

DANGER
from
DEER

DANGER FROM DEER !

THE PUBLIC ARE WARNED THAT IT IS DANGEROUS
AT ALL TIMES TO GO CLOSE TO THESE ANIMALS.
THE DANGER IS ESPECIALLY GREAT DURING THE
RUTTING SEASON.

Sign in Bushy Park

Also by
VICKI BAUM

MARION ALIVE
BERLIN HOTEL
THE WEEPING WOOD
HEADLESS ANGEL

VICKI BAUM

DANGER
from
DEER

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PART ONE

"OH DEAR me——" sighed the frail old lady as she faced the steps leading up into the railway car; her smallness, together with her half-humorous, half-desperate expression, turned these modest three steps into a major obstacle, a wall to be scaled, a mountain to be conquered. Even the Pullman porter standing in front of car 179 felt something of this effect, and his otherwise normal five feet ten seemed to him suddenly of a freakish size. With a cheerful and embarrassed: "Excuse me, ma'am," he gingerly grabbed the light piece of goods at the elbows and lifted her up. "Permit me, Mrs. Ambros," said an officer, turning around at the topmost step, and with a gentle push and shove he hauled her in. Mrs. Ambros, having set her mouth and gallantly managed the steep ascent, smiled gratitude in all directions. "Thank you, my good man, and thank you so much, Major Ryerson. What a pleasant surprise to meet you on this train. It's really too silly what a useless person I've become since I'm having that little trouble—in here——" Her strikingly small and narrow hand in the correct white doeskin glove wanted to go to her heart but left the little gesture unfinished, and in the resigned way this feeble hand dropped again while she kept on smiling was the essence of her compelling charm: humorous self-deprecation, and the burden of age worn proudly.

"And how far east are you going, Major?"

"To Washington; got to tie up a few loose ends and also——"

"How nice——" Mrs. Ambros said conversationally, but she was beginning to grow fidgety. "I wonder where my daughter is keeping herself? She always gets lost in railway stations and post offices, the silly girl," she said, inadvertently blocking the way for two young artillery officers who were

helped up the steps by a tough elderly army nurse. One of them was on crutches and the other had his head in a bandage; their faces were childish and yet too matured, the typical faces of boys who had been flung from the school bench into the war that had only recently come to its end. They stopped awkwardly in front of the old lady who was obstructing their way; but at this moment Miss Ambros arrived, a bit out of breath.

"Sorry, Mother; I only bought the magazines you wanted," she said, stepping aside to let the nurse shepherd her charges into the car. Miss Ambros was neither young nor old; lean and tall, she was heavily loaded with magazines, handbag, a small overnight case, an old-fashioned plaid steamer rug, and two sports coats, her own and that of her mother. "Come, let's find our seats, Mother," she said, leading Mrs. Ambros away from the steps.

"Oh dear me," Mrs. Ambros exclaimed again as she found the car overcrowded with uniforms, young war brides, and babies. This time she pressed her hand discreetly against her chest and supported herself on the back of a seat. She looked around for Major Ryerson to come to her assistance but he had disappeared.

"Aren't you feeling well, lady?" a young navy ensign asked, jumping to his feet, while Miss Ambros summoned the porter, who quickly appeared and uprooted a ludicrously young mother who had spread herself over their reserved section while putting fresh diapers on a twin set of enormous Californian babies.

"Thank you—I'll be all right in a moment—just one of my little dizzy spells," Mrs. Ambros said with her brave smile and took possession of the cleared space. "Thank heavens we're seated," she sighed when she had settled down; "for a moment I was afraid I might faint. I really shouldn't have undertaken this trip."

"No you shouldn't," her daughter replied without looking at her. Mrs. Ambros shot a quick, sharp glance at the bony, non-committal face and opened a magazine. In spite of her fragility there was something youthful about her small neat person, while Miss Ambros looked as though she had never been really young. The mother's figure was delicate, her movements quick and somehow girlish, and her skin, although wrinkled like very fine tissue paper, was white and pink under the very thinnest film of fragrant powder. Her hair, a ripple of

white satin, was beautifully groomed and blued, and she had shining clear eyes, almost the eyes of a child untouched by life. Miss Joy Ambros, on the other hand, was an angular flailing Dutch windmill of a girl, tanned and leathery, her mouth set between lines resembling parentheses, and her eyes in the deep, shadowy sockets were slightly reddened, slightly tired, as are the eyes of those who read or think too much. . . .

She hung the coats on her side of the section, folded the steamer rug and put it within reach of her stepmother, and then she took off her felt hat and pushed back her thick, rebellious hair. "Are you comfortable, Mother?" she asked before installing herself.

"It's quite cold in here, isn't it? I wonder what's the matter with their heating system?" Mrs. Ambros said plaintively and Joy unfolded the rug and spread it over her knees. "Thanks, Daughter. What would I do without you," said Mrs. Ambros.

"I wonder——" said Miss Ambros.

Mrs. Ambros put the magazine aside. "That ferry trip across the bay is always so awful it leaves me completely limp," she said, and as she received no answer, she leaned her head back and closed her eyes. If we could afford a car, we wouldn't have had to go through that push and crush at the wicket of the Ferry Building, she thought. Or a taxi at least. And the scramble on and off the boat, worse than ever in these times of the home-coming warrior; the wind, the draught, the noise, the smell. And Joy, inconsiderate as usual; dumping me in any old corner as though I were just another piece of luggage and planting herself conspicuously at the most wind-blown spot of the entire ferry, as if to pose for the Winged Victory. For some reason Joy seemed never to get enough of San Francisco, especially as seen from the ferry; probably a sentimental carry-over from those outings with her young man—what was his name? Good lord, one time those two lunatics spent an entire afternoon going back and forth on the ferry, while I was left alone at home to sit and fret and worry. Well, in the end this Fred Hollenbeck at least showed enough sense to withdraw in time and like a gentleman. . . .

The station noises were rising to a pitch, loudspeakers booming, all-aboard calls, empty luggage trolleys rumbling away, hiss and clank of the starting train, and then the platforms and walls and girders and stairs of Oakland Station seemed to be moving backward, slowly at first and then faster,

and then the train shuddered out into the dreary suburban streets coming up in the dusk.

Joy, too, had closed her eyes, better to hold the image of the city she had left behind, the many superimposed, ever-different images of San Francisco at sunset. When a gale was blowing and the fog rushed about in grey shreds and a brassy light struck the houses on the hills and the jagged skyscrapers downtown, the city might turn into a foreboding place like El Greco's Toledo; again, she was a sparse Japanese woodcut, layer beyond layer of island and shore line, in ever thinning contours swimming away in the luminous mist. Today she had been wearing her medieval costume: her streets of obnoxious gabled and turreted gingerbread changed into crest-crowning ramparts, Coit Tower, rising from the eucalyptus tangle on Telegraph Hill, shedding its mediocrity and becoming something noble like one of the watchtowers of the Toscana. Oh, trash, trash, twelve lumps of sugar in one cup of coffee! Joy thought, her eyelids beating impatiently. Let's have the true colours instead of this Chamber of Commerce stuff. The bay in sunshine, a thick cobalt blue like a picture postcard from the Mediterranean, but on stormy days an unfriendly Atlantic, dark greys with some uncompromising black and white, an abstract pattern of the troughs and caps of waves. Today—would you say a soft old pewter bowl with a white streak of silver where the sun struck the surface? Yes, and you know that you would make a nice smear of it if you tried to paint it. The sickle lines at the side of her mouth deepened. But wait, just before they reached the Oakland mole there had been something else, a cold empty sharp green dusk; Joy struggled to conjure up that marvellous green once more and store it away in her mind, a white seagull flew loneliness against a black sky—and then Mrs. Ambros stirred and Joy opened her eyes.

"Now it's getting too warm," said Mrs. Ambros, "and the air is unbearable." The twin babies had begun to cry and, against all rules, some of the military were smoking. "I wonder how I shall stand three days of this?" Mrs. Ambros asked the world at large. Joy made no comment.

"Come, let me have your coat," she only said, helping her mother to take it off. It was a mink coat, not quite the latest fashion, but of very fine dark skins and well made.

Her own coat was lamb made to look like beaver; she had bought it at a sale at Mergenheimer's.

Soon after the train had pulled out of Oakland a melodious waiter sounded the first call for supper and a slow, irresistible lava stream of hungry passengers began pushing towards the dining-car. This crowded train did not carry too heavy a load of courtesy, but as much as there was of it was shown to little Mrs. Ambros. Backs were flattened against the walls and stomachs sucked in to make way for her steadfast advance. Willing hands helped her through the perilous passages connecting the cars like so many dark shivering insides of sick accordions, and heavy doors were opened for her by young soldiers who had forgotten their manners out in the Pacific but remembered them at the sight of the nice old lady. At the entrance to the dining-car, where the steel-grey walls exuded the heat of the kitchen and the odour of boiled fish, the stream was stopped by a harassed steward handing out numbered tickets. There was some muttering and cursing, but only in good-natured fun, for all these people were used to standing in queues and some of the boys did not mind getting pressed closely against the young women who, with their slim slacks, new permanent waves and in quivering anticipation, were on their way to meet their returning husbands. A few wolf-calls could be heard, some jokes, some scraps of informal conversations.

"... how about a crap game while we're waiting? ... his mother says she'll take the baby but I won't let her have it ... only four dollar twenty and it's washable ... mine weighs twenty-one pounds, that's what my wife writes me, not even a year old and twenty-one pounds ... Yeah? And where was you when we got into that mess at Cassino? ..."

The air grew warmer and closer, the jokes bolder, and then there was a slight commotion at the centre of the stagnating mass and some of the people in front turned around while those behind pressed forward.

"... hey there, what'samatter? ... Steady, steady now—Granmaw got faint. ... No wonder, I'm feeling faint myself. ... Is there a doctor in the house? ... Get her to a chair—listen, you, let her through—there, there now—give her a sip of likker—better bring some water, George—there, that's it; feeling better, Granmaw ... ?"

Mrs. Ambros emerged, shaken and trembling. The tough elderly nurse felt her pulse without any show of compassion, and the lieutenant with the bandaged head ushered her gently to his chair.

Mrs. Ambros was an old hand at recovering from fainting spells and she did it graciously and discreetly. "Forgive me for causing such a disturbance, please, you all must forgive me, it's this silly heart of mine—Please, Lieutenant, you mustn't interrupt your dinner, I won't allow it, under any circumstances—"

"Oh, that's okay, ma'am. We were through eating anyway, weren't we, Nurse?"

"I shouldn't have gone on this trip, my doctor warned me. But, you see, my son is coming back from overseas and I haven't seen him for almost two years—oh, thank you, thank you, you are really too kind, bless you." Mrs. Ambros took possession of the chair and put her handbag on the table. "And now," she said, "if someone could be good enough to find my daughter."

The excitement fizzled out, the two invalids who had given Mrs. Ambros their table went to the lounge car, and a minute later Miss Ambros was produced and, not without some haggling, permitted to pass.

Many people were still standing in a queue by the time mother and daughter were finishing a light supper. They had hardly exchanged a word during the meal, although the younger woman treated the older one with punctilious politeness, pouring water in her glass, offering her the toast, putting sugar and milk into her tea, and finally paying the bill and tipping the waiter. "May I smoke?" she asked and only after Mrs. Ambros had nodded her assent did she pull a cigarette case from her handbag and snap it open. It was a man's golden tabatière, large, heavy, and old-fashioned, with a small crown in the upper corner and a few words of dedication in a flighty handwriting engraved on the inside. The glances of the two women met and crossed on this outmoded and inappropriate object like the rapiers of two fencers in the grand salute.

"You ought to give it to Charles as a home-coming gift, dear," Mrs. Ambros said. "It rightly belongs to him. After all, it was Father's."

"That's the reason I want to keep it," said Joy. She snapped it closed, lit her cigarette, and drained the smoke deep into her lungs. "Well, shall we give other people a chance to eat, and go to the lounge for a few minutes, Mother?"

It was one of the old observation cars which the harassed railway company had pressed into service after adding a bar and a few chromium gadgets. The air here was thick with

smoke and every seat was taken. But as Mrs. Ambros hesitated, a helpless and quite incongruous Dresden figurine in all the masculine atmosphere, Major Ryerson got up and offered her his place next to a heavy-set man reading the *Daily Chronicle*. "Sit down, Mrs. Ambros, sit down—you know George Watts, don't you?"

The lawyer looked up from his paper: he was a man in his late fifties with the gruffly watchful expression and the loosely folded dewlaps of an ageing bulldog.

"Of course I know our George—as who wouldn't in San Francisco? We've worked at the Red Cross together, and in all sorts of committees, haven't we, George? I don't know what we should have done sometimes without our George. The rabbits that man can pull out of his hat when it comes to raising money——"

"You're very kind, Ann, but haven't you learned yet that I'm congenitally allergic to compliments?" Watts said, hoisting himself out of his chair. "Hello, Joy, nice seeing you. Have you met Tom Ryerson?"

"Only by remote control; I've read some of your articles, Major Ryerson," Joy said and it sounded as though she hadn't cared one whit for them. Ryerson shrugged it off. He was a tall man with prematurely white hair, and his face was lined but not old. Perhaps he had been a young man before he saw Hiroshima and wrote those articles about it, she thought, in passing. The train was going into a curve and the car lurched forward. Groping for a hold, Mrs. Ambros hung on to Watts's lapels as though they were straps. She was smiling up at him and he was looking down on her as men had always looked down on her smallness that made them feel taller and stronger and manlier than they actually were.

"You never change, do you, Ann?" he said, arranging the folds of his face into a laborious smile.

Mrs. Ambros kept leaning against his bulky person for another moment and then she dropped her hands and let go of him. "I'll accept that as quite a compliment—especially coming from you, George," she said softly. Joy stood by with a curious, unseeing expression; she took a last drag on her cigarette and violently squashed it in one of the ash-trays. "But I mustn't keep you standing, no, no, I wouldn't dream of robbing you of your chairs," Mrs. Ambros said graciously. "I really think I'm beginning to like this train, now that I know you are aboard. Come, dear, let's sit outside

for a little spell—if it isn't too cold for you," she said to Joy, "the air in here is hardly fit to breathe; oh, please, George, could you open the door for me, it's so heavy. Thanks, and we'll see you later——"

Ryerson closed the door behind the two ladies. "She's charming," he said, sitting down again, "really charming."

"If you hope to write next year's best short story I'd recommend more discrimination in the choice of your adjectives. Joy Ambros is something much better than charming."

"Who's talking about her? I meant the mother. There's something—well—ageless about her sort of charm, something our young women have lost. Would it grate on your nerves if I used as old-fashioned an expression as graciousness?"

"Faith, Hope, and Charity! Ours are not particularly gracious times, Tommy, or didn't you notice?"

"Sure. With the girls right in the midst of the free-for-all, and no holds barred. They're getting too goddamn independent and strong and efficient, if you ask me. Makes them a bit shrill and brittle and when it's all said and done they end up with a nervous breakdown and the psychoanalyst at twenty-five bucks a throw," said Ryerson, who was still sore from his recent divorce.

"Don't let's bring up Corinne for a little while," suggested Watts, who as his lawyer had straightened out some of the mess. "And not the atom bomb either, if that's okay with you, Tom. I'm on my vacation."

"I was only talking about Mrs. Ambros; you can't help liking her; an old number, yet she's so feminine, you want to do things for her and that makes you feel good. On her hundredth birthday she'll still let you know that she is a woman and a lovely one. The younger generation doesn't wear so well, that's what I'm talking about."

"The younger generation had the carpet pulled out from under their feet and took a bad fall and the floor keeps shaking and maybe the younger generation have more important things to worry about than how to be lovely."

"The floor has been shaking before and to my mind the younger generation uses a lot of alibis. Mrs. Ambros' life wasn't all sugar and spice either, I've been told, and yet——"

"You think you're a wise old man because you have white hair at forty-three, don't you? Where did you meet her anyway?"

"She's a Gray Lady, offered to write my letters and such when I was in the hospital."

"I see. You met her with her halo on and I've seen her without it. Makes all the difference."

"You know Mrs. Ambros well?"

"Quite well, Tommy boy, and quite a long time. We were sort of neighbours, when I was a boy; the Ballard family owned a little summer house over in Belvedere and my father was running the inn in Tiburon."

"Now I know what's the matter: you were in love with her but she married Mr. Ambros."

It was a notion which seemed to amuse the old lawyer. "That wouldn't even do for a dime novel, Tommy," he said with mild reproach. "I hope you realize that Ann was a married woman when I got my first long pants."

"But there's something between you and her; I could sense it by the sweet-sour way you acted and the way she looks at you—I could swear the old girl still goes for you."

"Good Lord, but you're wide off the mark, Tom! Ann hates my guts and you have an appalling sort of an imagination. What's between us is the fact that every time Ann got herself into a major jam I had to investigate her claims against the insurance company I represented. She never forgave me for sticking my nose into her most private affairs, and that's all. Well, according to psychology, if a person gets repeatedly into the same sort of a jam it is because her subconscious wants it so."

"I doubt, however, that Mrs. Ambros' subconscious brought on the Earthquake."

"The Fire, you mean," Watts said with the San Franciscan's customary leniency towards outsiders' ignorance of a few important local taboos.

"Earthquake or Fire, whatever you call it, I was told that wisp of a woman saved her daughter from a burning house—"

"Yes, I know that story too, you student of San Francisco's lore and legend. Incidentally, Joy is her stepdaughter. Joy's mother was the other Ballard girl, Ann's sister Maud, that is. Poor Maud, I was very fond of her. When she died—she was only thirty then—Ann took over the whole caboodle, the house, the baby, and the celebrated Mr. Ambros plus his celebrated violin. It can't have been an easy assignment and it looked like quite a sacrifice, but I guess it was what Ann wanted or she wouldn't have done it."

"He drank, didn't he?"

"Lord no, that was her first husband, Clyde Hopper; not a bad guy but a drunkard. If you think that Mrs. Ambros is lovely now, you should have seen her as a mourning young widow! No—Ambros was strictly an old-sherry-and-imported-champagne man. A queer duck, the continental type, you know. He never quite fitted into our town, for all our provincial bragging about being so darned cosmopolitan. Well, first their house was burned down and next Mr. Ambros died rather unexpectedly and a year later, in 1929, Ann lost every cent of the insurance money on the stock market. The only tangible asset she has left from her second marriage is Joy. Now there's a fine girl! You may keep your Mrs. Ambros with all her gracious charms and I take Maud's daughter."

"Does Miss Ambros resemble her mother?"

"Not in looks; she is much more her father's child—except that she is just as unselfish as Maud was. I was very fond of Maud——"

"Well, if a girl is as spinsterish and unattractive as this Miss Ambros she'd better be selfless and kind."

"I suggest you turn down the volume, here she comes. And sometime when you have nothing better to do, take another look at her. If that's what you call unattractive——Hi, Joy, where's the fire?"

"Oh, hello—are you still here?" Joy said absent-mindedly, but she stopped for a moment, searching for a match to light her cigarette. As she bent over the one Ryerson lit for her he took the recommended second look. No, he thought, somewhat surprised, she is not really unattractive, but you couldn't call her attractive either. Her features were too strong, her forehead too broad, her eyebrows too heavy. Not the warm living flesh of a woman but a marble statue's stony beauty excluding all prettiness.

"I'm fetching Mother's fur coat from our car; it's getting bitter cold on that open observation platform."

"That's a hell of a place to park a mother. Don't you know that these platforms are the preserve of future presidents on the stump?" grumbled the lawyer.

"Oh, you know Mother; she gets restless on trains. She is apt to work herself up into a mild attack of claustrophobia."

"How far are you going? All the way to New York?"

"Yes, and up to Boston. That's where my brother's trans-

port is supposed to arrive next Monday, we hope." As she said it there came something, a transience more than a smile, into her eyes.

"That's splendid. No wonder your mother is restless. And young Mrs. Ambros— isn't she going with you?"

"Susan? No—she—Susan couldn't get away from the children. You know how it is now with the servant problem, she has only a cleaning woman—and little Maxine caught the measles just a week ago—no, Susan won't be there. Only Mother."

"And you, Joy. I'm sure that's more important to Charles than all the brass bands and flags they'll bring out for the boys."

"Oh—I'm only his sister," Joy said; her eyes wandered off and out into the blackness before the windows where a few scattered lights were gliding by. For a moment Major Ryerson felt unaccountably sorry for her. He looked after her through the smoke of his pipe as she left.

"Can you tell me why the hell they would call her Joy? I couldn't think of a less suitable name. She never so much as smiles," he remarked. He had suddenly remembered why she made him think of an oversized marble statue. Michelangelo's Night at the Medici Chapel in Florence.

"Yes, parents do terrible things to children, don't they? And oranges don't grow sweet on the north slopes," the lawyer said. "But I assure you, even Joy was a fat, smiling baby once upon a time. . . ."

Shortly before ten o'clock Ryerson had come out into the narrow corridor so as not to fill the compartment he shared with the lawyer with the smell of the pipe he wanted to smoke before retiring. He was looking out into the night where nothing was to be seen, when with a delicate rustling and a whiff of lavender Mrs. Ambros appeared at his side; she was wrapped in a beautifully embroidered Chinese coat whose wide sleeves she was using like a muff, and her eyes were bright and shining like those of a child that had stayed up too late on a holiday picnic.

"Why, Mrs. Ambros—can't you sleep either?"

"For me there is no use trying to go to sleep at all. A sleeping-car frightens me, honestly, it does. I can't close an eye on a train, I never could. The vibration—it gives me my headaches." (She spoke about her headaches as though they were

a very personal and particular property of hers. My headaches. My mink coat. My daughter. In times past she had said with the same inflection: My husband . . .) "I'd rather stand up all night long in the corridor than lie down behind those awful green curtains. I know that's silly and foolish, but the moment I creep into one of those horrid berths I feel as if it were a coffin, and I'm in it, and they bury me alive; I choke, I die a thousand deaths—it's a nightmare, except that I have to go through it wide awake." A small hand slipped out of the large sleeve and went up to her throat; it made Ryerson think of the fluffy white pet mouse he had possessed as a boy.

"And the sights you get in a sleeper!" she went on. "I'm really not prudish—and you don't have to smile, Major—all right, you may call me fastidious, but it makes me slightly sick to be exposed to the sight of dozens of soldiers' hairy legs and unshaven faces——"

"Why didn't you get a compartment, Mrs. Ambros? I think they're quite comfortable."

"You forget that I'm not a V.I.P. Compartments are reserved for the high brass—— Mercy! I don't mean you, Major, certainly not, and you mustn't think that I am complaining. It's perfectly fair that you men who won the war for us get these little privileges and priorities—but a drawing-room is out of the question for us civilians——"

Ashamed of the luxury doled out to him, what else could Ryerson then do but offer Mrs. Ambros the compartment he was sharing with George Watts? The lawyer had been engrossed in some mystery story and was not too pleased about Ryerson's impulsive chivalry; but he put up a brave front, called the porter, and the transfer and exchange were accomplished, not without causing quite a stir in the sleeping-car. It was one of Mrs. Ambros' peculiarities that, for all her quiet, modest and ingratiating manners, she frequently became the centre of little commotions, disturbances, and alarms. Faces peered out from behind the green baize curtains, the twins woke up and began to wail, and there was much shuffling back and forth, much whispering, much dragging of suitcases from under the berths; Mr. Watts, already in his bedroom slippers and robe, had a black look on his face, and nice Major Ryerson was almost sorry he had ever started all the upheaval. Joy, still fully dressed in her brown tweeds, did her part of carrying and moving in silence and with no more than a formal "thank you" to the two obliging gentlemen. Mrs. Ambros

stood by with her helpless air and repeated that it was too much, really, and she could never forgive herself for mentioning anything at all about her discomfort, old fool that she was. But at last it was all accomplished, mother and daughter were installed in the double compartment, and the two men carried their portfolios into the sleeper.

"You see what I mean?" said Watts. "Your gracious lady played us for suckers." He was a heavy man and it took some acrobatics to get him out of his underwear, but Ryerson, climbing the ladder to upper 15, heard the lawyer chuckle in his lower.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

"Oh, almost nothing. I just remembered a sign I once saw in England. Ever been to Bushy Park? No? It's between Hampton Court and Richmond, and there was that sign in letters, man-high. You know what it said? DANGER FROM DEER!—that's what it said. There were those lovable, shy, soft animals with their Walt Disney eyelashes; and there was this sign fairly screaming: DANGER FROM DEER! THE PUBLIC ARE WARNED THAT IT IS DANGEROUS AT ALL TIMES TO GO CLOSE TO THESE ANIMALS, THE DANGER IS ESPECIALLY GREAT DURING THE RUTTING SEASON—or words to that effect. Every time I run into Ann Ambros she makes me think of that sign," said George Watts and pulled his curtain closed. "Well, good night, and have a good rest in your upper, Sir Galahad."

Joy Ambros was lying in the upper berth of compartment J and could not sleep. She had taken a sleeping pill and it had made her a little drowsy but she could not sleep. Habit-forming, Dr. Bryant had warned her. In the beginning she had not known what this word implied, but now she knew. At first you relied on the small pink capsule and it stopped you from thinking when thinking became too painful, and it wrapped you up in a soft warm forgetfulness; and after a while it still calmed you down and put you to sleep, but only for a few short and ever shorter hours. It let you wake at dawn in a drumming, throbbing panic and then you were lying, open-eyed, brooding about everything that could-have-been. Then came a time when you realized that one capsule had no effect at all and you would take two, and then these, also, would lose their magic power. And then you would remember the empty little bottle you had found on a certain morning on

Father's night table next to the open cigarette case; and you would fight your lonesome battle and summon all your will power and you would flush the rest of the little capsules down the toilet and resign yourself to the long, tormented nights. In the dark all the ifs and if-nots of a wasted and futile life were marching up against you, phalanx after phalanx, all the butterflies you hadn't caught, all the paintings you hadn't painted, all the life you hadn't lived.

Tonight, as she could not sleep, there were Charley and Susan and the children—Florian, four, and Maxine, six and a half—and something had to be done about saving them, and she, Joy, had to do it. Of course there was an easy way out since Dr. Bryant had renewed the prescription. There was the little bottle with the small capsules, the door one only had to open to be well out of it all. Joy held her breath and listened. Her mother was breathing deeply and regularly down there in the lower berth. The tiny circle of the blue night lamp gave out its swimming dim translucence. If I could only turn on the light and read a bit, it would help, Joy thought; but she knew that could not be done. Her mother's sleep must not be disturbed, the light could not be turned on, and Joy descended once more into the inferno that was waiting for her at the pit of insomnia.

Charley, and Susan, and the children, the little house on Russian Hill designed by Charley, the nursery Susan had painted herself, the funny toy animals she made for the children, the living-room whose ochre walls made sunshine even on rainy days, the flower border in the tiny garden Susan had planted, the children's books and cradle songs she made up herself: dear, merry, bright Susan! No, Joy thought for the thousandth time, nothing must happen to them, I won't allow it. Two days ago she had come across a photo of Charley at the age of four and very clearly she had remembered the lop-sided basket which Charley with his sticky, clumsy little boy's fingers had proudly manufactured as a gift for her own twelfth birthday. And with all these memories she smiled into the dissolving blue dimness of the compartment, and almost fell asleep, and almost postponed once more the decision that was demanded of her. . . .

And then the train pulled into some anonymous station and came to a stop; there were two rude jolts, and Mrs. Ambros, down there, stirred and woke up and turned on the light.

"Joy? Are you asleep, Joy?"

"Not quite, Mother."

"It's unbearable in here, isn't it? Suffocating. And so hot. Or maybe it's my blood pressure. I haven't closed an eye."

"Do you want to take something? A little sleeping powder?"

"Goodness, no. You know what I think of those things!" With another jerk and jolt the train moved on into the night. Somewhere the Main Street of the unknown little town was left behind with its pale depot, a few street lights, and two or three late cars, their noses against the sidewalk, dozing.

"Joy?"

"Yes, Mother?"

"If it isn't too much trouble—I'd like a drink of water."

Joy clambered down, found the bottle, and poured some of the stale water into the glass. She pulled down the blind and the small space closed still tighter around them. "Don't, Daughter. It chokes me. Here—feel my heart. Like a drum. Wouldn't it be awful if I got an attack on this trip?"

"You won't, Mother, you won't," said Joy, climbing into her berth again. Down there the light was turned off a bit later.

"I'm so terribly sorry to be such a burden to you," the lower berth whispered pitifully. "I don't mind lying in the dark—I want you to rest, even if I can't."

After a while there was some shuffling and rustling and padding and Joy turned on the light. Her mother, swaying with the movement of the train, had peeled off her nightgown and was in the process of getting fully dressed.

"What now, Mother?"

"I can't stand it any longer. If I stay here I shall die; don't mind me, Daughter. I'm going to the observation car for some fresh air."

Joy came down from her bed and helped her with the stockings, shoes, and slip. It was one of her duties and having to touch her mother's flesh disgusted her more from day to day. Not because it was old and wilted but rather because this skin still was smoother and whiter than her own, the leg still slim, the ankles fine, the arms still almost those of a young girl. There were none of the unappetizing symptoms of old age: Mrs. Ambros' hair grew fast and rich, all her teeth were proudly and soundly her own, and her digestion was perfect. Violet sachets in her lingerie and lavender salts in her bath; and even for this night's foray she was powdering her face and dabbing a mere breath of rouge on her cheeks. Joy wrapped her into her fur, quickly slipped her own coat over her

pyjamas, and took the old steamer rug over her arm. "Ready?" she asked.

"You mustn't come with me, Daughter, really, you mustn't if you don't want to. Maybe the porter will help me——"

Both of them knew that this was only said for formality's sake; Joy opened the door for her mother and steered her through the sleeping train. Only now did she feel that the sleeping pill had muffled her brain, wrapping all things in a queer veil of unreality. The train swayed, swayed, drumming the ever-same rhythm through the night, howling the ever-same hoarse call of the train whistle. They were walking through car after car, all sleeping, dreaming, a breathing polyphony, and to Joy it soon seemed as though it were always the same car they were passing, like the ever-repeated same streets one might wander in a bad dream.

At last they reached the lounge, which seemed much too bright and alert after all the somnolent wandering. There were still a few card-playing passengers about, the two Pullman conductors were having a beer, the elderly nurse was writing a letter, the barman was watching the checker game of the two young officers. They all looked up as Joy and her mother entered, and Mrs. Ambros gave them her bright-eyed, apologetic smile. "What night owls we girls are, aren't we?" she said gaily. "It's a shame—but, you see," she confided to the nurse, "I simply couldn't stand it in there any longer. Let's hope the fresh air will help me."

The nurse looked briefly over her shoulder, said, "Sure," and returned to her letter. Joy opened the door to the small observation platform. The air spanked her face like a cold hand, ran down her legs, and tugged at the pants of her pyjamas. It woke her up from the floating unreality in which she had made her way and now she was sorry she hadn't dressed completely like her mother. But then, in her mother's company she very often had the sensation of being invisible, and that had made her careless of herself.

"Well—that's better, isn't it, Daughter?" sighed Mrs. Ambros, sitting down on one of the two small benches. Joy, instinctively, took the other one, leaving the door to the lounge between them. Although the voice of the train was much louder out here, it seemed quieter than inside. The night was black and high, with a small sliver of moon running very fast through thin, ragged clouds. The blinds were drawn inside the lounge, separating and concealing the bright world

in there from the night out here, and after half a minute Joy's eyes had accustomed themselves to the darkness and she could see the rails slither away from under the train and disappear at a short distance in the mist covering the foothills. The reflection of the tail-lights struck a red and green gleam from the two steel snakes and here and there other lamps, red and white, stood like watchful dwarfs along the right of way.

"Joy—did you bring the rug along? My feet are getting cold."

"Yes, Mother," said Joy and, kneeling down, she tucked the old steamer rug around the legs of the old lady who was kindly smiling down at her. There was a faint smell of moth balls and of the musty old trunk in which the relic used to sleep between journeys. "Sometimes you remind me so much of your dear father; he used to tuck me in like that when I felt miserable during those crossings. You know how often I crossed the Atlantic with your father?" Joy knew it, but let her mother go on. "What a restless man he was! and poor me, tagging after him from hotel to hotel and never getting used to it. Believe me, being married to a celebrity isn't always a bed of roses. But I guess I liked it in spite of everything."

Joy sat down at her side of the door again and clasped her hands tightly behind her back; this, too, she remembered, was a gesture she had inherited from her father.

"What's the matter, Daughter? Cat got your tongue? You are not very entertaining. Why don't you tell me something for a change?"

"What should I tell you, Mother? I don't know anything you wouldn't know."

"You said good-bye over the phone to Susan yesterday—I heard you."

"Well, what of it? You heard me."

"Did she—I mean—did she sound—you know what I mean—did she sound uneasy?"

Joy shrugged her shoulders. "She wasn't too pleased that it's you instead of her who's going to meet Charley, if that's what you want to know," she said at last, clasping her hands still tighter, feeling every hard tense knuckle in them.

A sleeping huddle of houses went gliding by, the glass cage of a watchtower poured a passing gleam over the rails, three heavy trucks were patiently grinding up a gradient on an invisible highway alongside the train; and darkness again. Then

the brakeman appeared, stepping out from the bright car into the dark of the platform; he was carrying a little lantern and seemed startled at the sight of two ladies out there so late at night.

"Good evening, folks, nice night, ain't it?" he said however, friendly enough. "Say, aren't you girls getting cold? Me, I like it a little nippy but you girls ain't used to it." Obviously he thought them young and attractive, but after lifting his lantern and catching a glimpse of Joy's closed face, he retreated. "Well, lady, everyone to his taste, that's what I always tell my missus."

Joy tried not to hear her mother's answer; there was the heart attack again, the headaches, the impossibility of standing a night inside. She watched the man testing some bolt or lever that locked the small gate in the railing. "Train's twenty-two minutes behind, but it's catching up now," he remarked, scanning his wrist watch in the small light-circle of his lantern. "Well, good night, ladies—and don't stay out too late or you'll catch cold." He opened the door of the lounge and after he had disappeared through the lighted triangle it was darker than before. Joy loosened her hands that wanted to hold on to each other as though in a cramp and took out her cigarette case and matches.

"May I smoke, Mother?"

"If you must."

She swallowed the smoke, and its bitter taste ran into her like a bracing medicine. "Mother——" she said, sitting very rigidly, pressing her spine, the nape of her neck, the back of her head, steeply against the cold wood. "Listen, Mother. This trip isn't doing you any good. Tomorrow morning we shall be in Ogden. Let's get off the train there and go back to San Francisco."

If Mrs. Ambros was startled, she did not show it. "That doesn't seem such a very good idea, dear," she answered evenly. "I have made up my mind to meet Charles first and you know me; once I've made up my mind——"

"Yes, Mother, I know you. But this time I, too, have made up my mind."

"I appreciate your being worried about what this trip might do to my health, but I never shied away from making sacrifices. You ought to know that better than anyone else, dear, and you also know very well why I must talk to Charley before any gossip can hurt him. He's my son and——"

"Oh, for Christ's sake, don't waste those touching speeches on me! Let's talk straight for once, Mother: I won't allow you to go to Boston, and that's that."

Joy was trembling with painfully restrained agitation, but Mrs. Ambros remained unruffled. "Come now, Joy, you mustn't let that nasty Ambros temper run away with you, get a hold on your nerves."

"Listen, Mother: tonight we'll leave off all the trimmings for once. This has nothing to do with my nerves and I'm telling you, very calmly and very definitely, that I'm not going to stand by and let you ruin Charley's life as you've ruined mine and—and everybody's who ever came near you. You've done enough harm and you are not going to break up his marriage. You are going off this train in the morning and if I have to drag you off by your goddam lovely white hair, do you hear me?"

"That's a good joke, that is! Now I am the one who is breaking up Charles's marriage! I suppose that little slut he married is white as snow? If you think I'll permit my son to be made the laughing-stock of San Francisco you are crazy. Everybody knows what's going on between Susan and that preposterous Larry Grant. It's absolutely impossible for me to let Charles walk into that morass without warning him. Now really, Joy——"

"Mother, listen, Mother——" Joy said, trying to keep the disgust, the desperation, the seething hatred under control. "Mother—there are the children; don't you want them to grow up in a home—under a roof—with some sort of security and stability? They are your grandchildren, you're fond of them, you don't want them to be pushed around the way we were. I don't know what Susan did or didn't do and you don't know either——"

"You bet your life I do! I'm not blind, I watched what was going on—in fact I caught her in such a scandalous situation that she was forced to confess the truth——"

"Confess—but that's nonsense! Don't lie, Mother, please, don't, where the whole existence of a family is at stake. Whatever there might be between Susan and Larry, it's none of your business and you wouldn't understand it, it's their life and their problem, Susan's and Charley's and Larry's, and I won't let you mess around with it. I won't, do you hear me? This time I won't."

"Oh, you won't! Well, and I won't let Charles go home and

make a fool of himself. I know Susan, she's awfully shrewd in handling her men; I'm sure she would have a good touching story ready for Charles and it would all end with tears and forgiveness and my poor boy would be trapped all over again. He should never have married her, that cheap, calculating chit of an office girl! I was against it from the beginning and I was right. But this time she has gone a bit too far and I just wonder how you're going to stop me from telling Charles what his wife did while he was fighting overseas."

Yes, how? In Joy's blunted mind the question rolled back and forth like a heavy, burning ball as it had rolled back and forth for days and weeks. How does one stop Ann Ambros from doing evil? Certainly not by persuasion and common sense, nor by an appeal to fairness. By making a scandal? By force? By killing myself like my father killed himself? But had that stopped her? Had it? Had it? Joy had jumped up during the mounting quarrel and was pacing the confined space of the platform, back and forth, back and forth, caged, two steps forward and two steps back. She flung her cigarette away; the tiny spark arched out into the darkness, and she wished for a forest fire to swallow up the train with herself and her stepmother on it. The train was speeding up, the black air drilled her face with a thousand needles, and away in the distance, low on the horizon, there were now some stars, only three or four. Joy tried to fasten her eyes upon them and concentrate, while she dug with trembling, shaking hands in the pockets of her coat for her cigarette case but could not find it. It was, strangely enough, this last little failure that drove her to the utmost reaches of desperation. Bending down to Mrs. Ambros, she said softly, almost gently: "Oh yes, I'll stop you, even if I have to kill myself. I wrote Charley a letter and explained everything to him; I'll kill myself, Mother, and when I'm dead he'll believe me and Larry and Susan, and not you. Oh no, not you——"

"You're out of your mind," said Mrs. Ambros with an incredulous smile. "Unbalanced—I feel sorry for you, Joy, honestly, I do."

The train was still speeding up and now it changed its voice again as it entered a bridge hung up between nothing and nothing; there was some mist hanging over the depth tinged red by the tail light, and down there, black and steep, some river, some gulch, some chasm, unknown, unseen in the night. Joy, backing against the railing with her hands clasped behind

her, had found the bolt that kept it closed and was tearing at it. Perhaps it is true, perhaps I am crazy, maybe you drove me insane, me too, and now you want to ruin Charley, but I won't let you, I won't let you—and then the bolt gave and the gate came open.

Mrs. Ambros had jumped up and was trying to get her away from that dangerous railing. Joy was strong, but so was little Mrs. Ambros, amazingly strong. "I won't let you—I won't let you," whispered Joy; she believed herself to be screaming but what came out of her constricted throat was only a choked whisper. "You've killed my mother, you've killed my father. You've ruined my life and now you want to ruin Charley's too. But I won't let you, I won't let you, I won't let you—I'll kill you myself first. I'll kill you before I let you harm Charles——"

They were fighting now, body on body, breathing, panting. Never had Joy seen her stepmother's face so close, so determined, and yet so astonished. As her grip tightened around the youthful old arms, the mouth of the old woman opened wide and round and black and shrill, screaming "HELP! HELP!" But her cry was lost in the hoarser, louder shriek of the train whistle. Joy pressed her hand over this screaming mouth, she felt it wet and soft and repulsive, then there was a sharp little pain as Mrs. Ambros bit into the heel of her thumb; and then an immeasurable relief as her fingers were digging into the flesh of the enemy, and scream and shriek of the whistle and rush and clank of steel girders and drumming of wheels on rails and the hatred and the fears of a lifetime blended in one great blazing roaring explosion. Something giving away and hurtling out into nowhere and not being there any longer, but all this had happened long ago, and often, and perhaps in dreams only——

And then there was nothing.

Red, then white, then black, a great empty weakness, as if the blood were running out of her and would not be stemmed. And nothing but this nothingness around her.

The platform was empty.

The narrow little gate in the railing swung back and forth, clicking. The train had left the bridge and was rolling along the rim of a steep embankment; then it entered a narrow defile between rocks which suddenly sprang out of the night, and rolled on and on over the constricted pass and out into the hilly, dipping land. Somewhere, back there, Mrs. Ambros was

left where she had been flung off the train. With her eyes closed and her senses slowly returning from the trembling nothingness, Joy could see her. A small dark bundle smashing against the steel girders of the bridge; dropping like an empty bag down into the river; a helpless bunch of brittle old bones hurtling down the steep embankment to their crashing destruction.

"I'm glad——" Joy said aloud. "Yes, I am glad. You had it coming."

Her legs buckled under her and she sat quickly down, permitting herself another brief rest in the merciful emptiness and strange contentment of the committed deed. After a while she began to grope in her pockets for the cigarette case and lit a cigarette. She held the glimmering match until it singed the tips of her fingers, and in the tiny gleam she was absently reading the dedication on the inside of the open case. "Dem grossen Geiger Florian Ambros von seinem aufrichtigen Freund und Bewunderer Erzherzog Joseph Albertus von Habsburg 1895." So long ago, she thought, so long ago. Poor Papa, poor great Florian Ambros—and the glamour of a period of which he had sometimes told her flared up for a moment in the last spark of the match and was extinguished. After that she sat motionless for a long time. Charley will be very sad, she thought, because somehow, I think, he was fond of his mother, in spite of everything. But it is better this way, everything is good now. Susan, and the children, and the house, and his work, it's all there waiting for him. Mothers do die, even the best of them, and Charles will get over it quickly. As for me—she thought and stopped, and then she tried to relax her hands and her clenched teeth and the straining, aching muscles in the back of her neck; as for me, I must pretend that nothing has happened, an unfortunate accident. I shall have to live with the lie and the poisoned knowledge and the secret buried in me; for me there is no easy way out. I have done it, but from now on I must carry it with me and watch myself, every word, every step, never let anyone know. There must be no scandal, nothing sordid, when Charley comes home. I must be clever now, very clever and, great God in heaven! clever I never was ——

Much later, when she had it all clear in her mind and her hands had stopped shaking, she got up and went back into the lounge. It was like stepping across the threshold into a world she had given up, a normal world where lights were burning

and people drank beer. The lights were not burning as brightly as before, because the last passengers had left and the barman was about to close up. Joy stared at him and tried to say what she had memorized out there on the platform.

"Excuse me—could I—could I have some whisky?"

"Sorry, lady. No drinks served after midnight."

"Oh—I see. I wanted it only for my mother. She—she suffers those fainting spells; she went out there, you know, for the fresh air and she got very dizzy. I thought a bit of whisky would bring her around, it usually does. She is quite old and not so very strong—or do I need a doctor's prescription for a bit of liquor?"

"That's right; she was complaining about her weak heart all day long, wasn't she?" said one of the Pullman conductors, looking up from a sheet on which he was making entries. "Well, get a move on, Joe. If it's medicine the lady is asking for . . ."

"You don't ought to let the old lady stay out there at all hours of the night, miss. Might catch a pneumonia like as not," the barman grumbled. "You're looking as if a wee nip wouldn't hurt you neither," he added after a glance at Joy's blanched face. With a sigh of reproach he unlocked his stores once more and produced two bottles. "Bourbon or Scotch? Straight or with soda?"

"Two Scotches, straight," said Joy; "thank you; thank you very much. Sorry I had to trouble you." She gulped her own drink down, paid and tipped the man and carried the other jigger with the clear, blessed liquid towards the door. Her hand did not shake.

"How do you like that? Probably another old lush, that mother of hers," the barman remarked to the conductor when Joy was out of earshot.

"Aw, shut up, Joe," said the other. "Nicest old lady you ever saw. Mrs. Ambros, I remember her from old times; had her and her husband on my train quite often." Delving into Mrs. Ambros' past seemed to fan a little spark of human kindness in the conductor's heart, for he added: "If she feels faint I'd better get her back to her car; give them service, that's what we're here for, after all."

But when he followed Miss Ambros out on the observation platform there was no Mrs. Ambros. There was only Miss Ambros, tall and pale and all gone to pieces, pointing at the open little gate swaying and clicking with the movement of the

train, and she was saying over and over again: "She must have fallen from the train in her dizzy spell—she must have fainted and fallen out—I should never have left her alone—I'll never forgive myself—she's gone—and I'm responsible for it."

A great thundering, roaring noise fell down from above and out of it the voice was calling:

"Angelina! Angelina!"

"Yes. Here I am," Mrs. Ambros answered meekly and with great effort she opened her eyes. Even then she could only see a borderless great nothing spinning around her in crazy circles, as though she were being rolled away in a black barrel. Dizzily she contemplated that this black nothing wherein she was trundled along was probably what the magazines called the Outer Spaces and it made her dimly wonder how she had ever arrived here. Most probably I am dead, she thought. To all appearances I have died without noticing it and now I'm dead. What fuss people make about it and when it comes to it, it's really quite easy. But she was tired and closed her eyes again, and immediately she was whirling away like a tiny, spinning top, a toy of God driven through the black circling void. On the whole, though, it was quite restful and she was about to give herself up to this pleasantly peaceful vacuum, had not the voice called again, louder and more urgent and even with a slight edge of nervous impatience:

"Angelina! Angelina!"

Now she recognized the voice as that of her dead husband, and her first reaction was that of an old, familiar, and almost forgotten exasperation. Oh, for heaven's sake, why can't you leave me alone? she thought. She felt quite sick in her stomach and as she tried taking a deep breath she couldn't do it. Now I'm in for it, she thought; now he's going to make a lot of trouble for me—and what else was there to be expected?

All her life Ann Ambros had been a thorough if unconscious materialist. Metaphysical speculations had never entered her mind, and God, if she ever thought of Him at all, was a fine, lenient old gentleman, shaped after the image of her father, who would dole out her rewards just like the candy and ample allowance Mr. Ballard had given her every Saturday, regardless of her behaviour during the week. As for death—and death was a quantity she had hardly ever contemplated, par-

ticularly not in any relation to herself—well then, death she had imagined more or less like pulling a blanket over one's nose and dropping off to sleep. Not once had it occurred to her that she would meet Florian in the Thereafter; in fact it was barely possible that she would have handled a few little matters differently had such a thought ever entered her mind . . .

Slowly the thunderous roaring subsided and Florian's voice seemed to fade away. Also the revolving blackness was slowing down like a celestial merry-go-round and at last it came to a stop. Now she could make out that the distant nothing above was the sky, with clouds hurrying past an emaciated moon. Beyond the reach of the moon's thin light, a few stars. The black shoulders of crouching hills, and very far away a pin-prick of light wickedly blinking at her—a beacon. After she had taken all this in she tried to find out where she was lying; but the moment she turned her head everything began to revolve again, and a pain, shrill as lightning, shot through her temples. Ann Ambros, who had never known a headache in all her sixty-five years, was appalled and quickly closed her eyes again. The little movement had upset her stomach and with a groan she sat up and fought off sickness. Not that sitting made matters any better. She felt as stiff and sore as she hadn't thought she could ever become, not even at eighty or ninety. Altogether, she resolved, if being dead should continue to be as unpleasant as this, she didn't want to have any of it. Setting her teeth, she discovered that her mouth was full of sand and gritty stuff. Heavens, she thought, I just hope they haven't buried me alive, the idiots! Breathing was still highly difficult and, great mercy, how her head was aching! She sent her hands out to explore the ground she was sitting on: sand, gravel, pebbles, thistles, tufts of hard dry grass. The harsh cry of two wide-winged night birds arising from a stunted willow tree brought her back to earth. Shucks, I'm not dead at all, she told herself; whatever made me think I was? But if I am alive, what happened? Where am I? How did I get here? And how on earth shall I get away?

She had been an ardent student—and later a relentless instructor—of the war's first-aid classes, and having determined that she was still among the living, she proceeded expertly to examine herself inch by inch. Bruises and abrasions on her legs, and, worse than that, her precious nylons were in shreds. There was a little man down on Market Street from whom you could get nylons, but he asked four dollars a pair, which

was an outrage. Moreover, there was a big flapping rent in the right sleeve of her mink coat. Mergenheimer's will have to mend it and, God knows, they'll charge a fortune for it and old Mergenheimer will try once more to talk me into buying an ermine cape for the opening of the opera. It's a shame my old ermine has turned yellow, it was such a beauty. Maybe I could still do something about my chinchilla stole, she thought; it was a pleasant idea to dwell on. Chinchilla is so distinguée, she thought, and except for ninety-year-old Mrs. Bensinger I would be the only woman in San Francisco with a chinchilla stole. Having restored her spirit somewhat with the memory of the chinchilla, she continued to take stock of herself. A bump as big as a plover's egg on her skull was probably the cause of her headache. The palms of her hands were burning, sand lodged in the raw skin, and her nails were split and broken. What a mess! she thought angrily. It'll take weeks and weeks to grow them again. Her stomach still felt queasy but the worst emergency had passed and she was almost certain she would not have to throw up, after all. Breathing was still very difficult, though. It might be only a wrenched ligament, but it felt suspiciously like the broken ribs she had twice suffered in former accidents. What else? Maybe a concussion? "Well, I hope not!" Ann said loudly and emphatically. Shock? Glassy eyes? Chills? Who—me? Don't be silly. But how on earth did I ever get into this predicament?

She tried to look up all the way to the crest of the steep slope at whose foot she found herself, but her neck refused to function freely and she had to give up. After this failure she sat very quietly for a little while, not daring to make another move.

How still it was, awfully still. It was hard to bear this deep absorbing stillness of the wide, empty night. At last she caught in all the silence a pleasant little sound—water running over a rock—and only then did she realize how terribly dry and thirsty she was. Still she did not dare get up, but very slowly and cautiously she crept towards the fine bubbling sound; across sand, across gravel, across the larger, rounder pebbles of the dry river bed and into the mist hovering over the small runnel that would become a flood when the rains came. She scooped up the water in her hands, rinsed her mouth, spit out the sand, washed her face, cooled her poor skinned legs and the cut on her left cheek. In her coat pocket she found a handkerchief, undamaged; she soaked it in the cold, cold water and

pressed it against the bump on her head and to her throbbing temples. The icy compress somewhat cleared her mind and she began retracing her steps one by one to find out what had happened to her.

This must be Tuesday, or rather Wednesday, as they had passed Reno shortly before midnight. The following Monday Charles's ship was expected to land in Boston and it was imperative for her not to miss it; she knew definitely that under no circumstances must she miss meeting Charles directly upon his arrival. But why this meeting was so absolutely and urgently necessary, she could not quite remember at the moment, and every effort at clearing this point upset her stomach all over again. She let it go for the time being and was rewarded with a complete and sharply focused memory of the train she had been on. An awful train altogether, crowded, full of pushing, inconsiderate, and vulgar people. Well then, she had almost choked in that stifling little box they had the nerve to call a bed, and she had gone out and caught a breath of fresh air and Joy had been ornery. Joy is becoming more and more difficult to live with, but it is my duty to bear up with her, Ann Ambros thought; it is my duty to look after the poor, unbalanced girl even if she does everything to make my life miserable. Goodness, if Father had known how everything was going to turn out, he certainly would have made a different will; I'm sure it wasn't Father's intention to leave me high and dry, all alone in the world. It's a heap of trouble I've been taking upon myself with Joy, and that measly four thousand interest from her trust fund is a very small compensation for what I have to go through with her. Well, that can't be helped, Mrs. Ambros thought resignedly, Joy is the bone that you get thrown in with the meat. Now, let's see—Joy was slightly more intractable than usual and we quibbled a bit on that platform.

Yes, and then? She tried to remember, while the throbbing in her temples grew and the pain in the back of her head stabbed cruelly into her blunted thoughts. And then I must have fallen out of the train. But that's too silly, such a thing couldn't happen to me, she thought.

Suddenly a veil tore apart and she could see—with an extremely hard and sharp clarity she could see—the open little gate in the railing swing back and forth and she could hear its click—click—click. She sat up like a bolt, completely forgetting that it hurt. No, she told herself, by God, no, I didn't fall—Joy threw me from the train. There was murder in her eyes!

Now I remember everything, murder in her eyes, she wanted to strangle me, she wanted to kill me, yes, Joy wanted to kill me, and she did kill me, almost, almost! Me, who saved her life in the Fire, me, who was a mother and more than a mother to her——

All her life Ann Ambros had thrived on self-pity; being sorry for herself was her element, her very home, it was a cradle into which she crept whenever things didn't go the way she wanted; within that shell she could make herself very small and gentle, very soft—and completely invulnerable. Promptly the tears arrived, a copious lovely rich crop of tears shed over her own defenceless, sweet, gracious self. As always, the crying left her light and empty and pleasantly fatigued; her head felt much better and, dabbing her brow with the cool wet handkerchief, she leaned her back against one of the boulders and closed her eyes. But I mustn't fall asleep, she told herself, counting up the dangers of the great wide outdoors. Rattle-snakes. Desert rats. Gila monsters. Roaming dogs. Coyotes. Thieving Indians and rapacious tramps. And with that she would have fallen asleep, had not the voice called her again.

"Angelina! Angelina!"

"Oh, for Pete's sake, can't you see I'm tired?" she muttered but the voice was insistent.

"Angelina, you can't stay here. It's a matter of life and death."

"All right, all right, you don't have to shout at me, I'm coming," she muttered. Supporting herself on the boulder, struggling and kicking like a horse that has fallen on a sleet-covered street, she hauled herself up, first on her raw-skinned knees, then straightening her back; and at last, with an utmost effort, she was standing on her feet. Experimentally she moved one leg and then the other: they worked.

Swaying, stumbling dizzily over the bumpy ground, she dragged herself away from the place of her accident.

PART TWO

"I SHALL call you Angelina," said Florian Ambros when he saw Ann Ballard for the first time. She was only fifteen, a schoolgirl painfully aware of her short skirt exposing thin legs in ribbed black cotton stockings, whereas Maud, safely past eighteen, wore a long, flowered challis gown and had her hair up. That was the beginning of it all, and if Ann had been the older sister the day she met Florian, everything would have turned out differently.

Before that day there had been the mirrors, always. They fascinated her, she could stare for a long time at the loveliness in the mirror that was herself, her own face, her smile, her hands; she would move them like a lady, she would try various kinds of smiles, all of them grown-up. She would flutter her eyelids or lower them or open wide her clear brown eyes to see herself mirrored once more, tiny and perfect, in the mirrored reflection of her dark pupils; it was like those dreams in which you were floating through doors and doors and doors without an end. . . .

"It's a bad you looka so much in da mirror, Anina mia, someday da devil he jump out and catch you," her Italian nursemaid Beatrice would scold her.

"Let him jump, I'm not afraid of him."

The day Florian left San Francisco without so much as a goodbye for her, she had beaten their little dog. She was tossed about by such a rage of hurt and disappointment that she had to let it out somehow and so she beat up the dog. "He must be punished, the dirty, dirty, dirty . . ."

"But he's just a little pup," Maud said. "Come to Maud, you poor little thing, there, there——" and Jolly tap-danced across the slippery floor and licked Maud's feet.

"Poor little pup! He was lying on my bed again; he'll never learn manners if I don't beat him up."

"The same might be said about you," retorted Maud. Ann could gladly have strangled her right then and there.

"... and these are my two girls," Mr. Ballard had said by way of introduction the day he brought Florian Ambros to their home on Clay Street. "Come here, Maud, I want you to meet Mr. Ambros, *the* great Florian Ambros. Now what do I get for snatching up a celebrity like him right from under the nose of old Mr. Bensinger and dragging him here for you ladies to shake hands with? Aren't you thrilled?"

"Why, Mr. Ballard!" Mrs. Ballard exclaimed, all aflutter. Maud's always high-coloured cheeks flushed a still deeper pink and her hands wanted to go into hiding in shame at being so large and chapped.

Mr. Ambros came away from the new grand piano in whose curve he had been nonchalantly leaning; he bowed from the waist and kissed Maud's embarrassed hand as though it were the most natural thing to do. It was the first hand-kissing Ann had seen executed outside of a stage play, and she watched the dazzling performance with amazed and hungry eyes. "But, please, I have not been properly introduced to this other charming young lady," he said in his too careful, foreign-sounding English as he turned his smile away from Maud and upon Ann.

"Oh, the little one? That's our Annie. Make your curtsy, Annie," Mrs. Ballard said, and Ann could have kicked her mother in the stoutly corseted stomach. However, she advanced gracefully, cancelling out the required curtsy by holding out her hand with a rather regal gesture. Fortunately she had had the presence of mind to wash her hands before rushing downstairs and to loosen the ends of her tightly plaited schoolgirl's braids to let her hair ripple quite accidentally over her shoulders. Blonde hair was rare in San Francisco; the papers warned constantly that dyes might paralyse the brain, and only a few fast women were known to take the professional risk of using henna on their hair and belladonna in their eyes.

"How do you do, Mr. Ambros," Ann said, purposefully catching a few thousand glints from a slanting sunbeam in her tresses.

Florian Ambros looked with a quizzical smile down upon her small adolescent person. "Annie?" he said, tasting the dull

sound of it. "It is not a good name for you. If you do not mind I shall call you Angelina." Her outstretched hand remained unknissed, but he took it in his and held it and then he cupped his other hand over hers in a gesture of spontaneous warmth. "It means little angel, you know," he said.

Ann looked up at him through her eyelashes. "Thank you, Mr. Ambros; I know a little Italian myself," she said, proudly demure.

"From her nursemaid——" Mr. Ballard said somewhere in a far-off distance.

The moment his hands enveloped hers it happened. It felt like the time Miss Fishbein had, just for instruction's sake, told them to form a chain and then sent an electric current through the class. The new sensation was tingling all through her, up and down her spine, cold in the nape of her neck, hot in her face, heavy in her knees. Mr. Ambros' fingers were long, strong, and each of them seemed to have a life of its own, giving off rays or whatever it was the fingers of a world-famous violinist would do to you. She did not dare look at them but she saw all the same that they were pale, like the keys on Grandma Ballard's old upright, a bit yellowed with nicotine stains, and they smelled faintly and wickedly of cigarettes. He was still holding her hand and he was going to call her Angelina.

The important meeting took place within the panelled walls of their so-called library, which since the recent acquisition of the grand piano had been renamed Our Music Room. Gambolling cherubs on the ceiling, high Chinese vases filled with bulrushes and pampas grass in the corners, William Shakespeare's collected works and *A Treasure Chest of Wisdom in Six Volumes* in the glassed-in bookcase. There was a great deal of refinement and culture about, yet Angelina sensed that Mother was angry at Father for bringing Mr. Ambros along without previous announcement and preparation. There had hardly been time to snatch the muslin covers from the brocaded settee and pull up the blinds. Of course, Mrs. Ballard would have preferred to open the big parlour and invite some of her friends and all of her rivals for the rare occasion. But Father, natural and informal almost to a fault, frequently did things like that on the spur of the moment. Yet Father was liked and respected everywhere, although he was only a miner's son and had grown up without much schooling in a mining camp near Placerville. But then, Father neither made

a secret of his humble beginnings nor was he boastful about it like some others of the successful self-made men downtown. Father was a gentleman, Father was kind and generous, Father was fun, Father was pretty wonderful altogether, Ann thought. She was proud of Father—most of the time at least. It was a pity Father should be married to a crabby nuisance like Mrs. Ballard, who tonight would be nagging Father for having embarrassed her, although you could see she was pleased he had caught the lion at all.

Florian Ambros' coming concert was the talk of the town, his impresario had seen to that. Posters everywhere, interviews in all the papers, little anecdotes, portrait sketches, quotations from the raving write-ups he had received in New York, Boston, Philadelphia; and as a more tangible proof of the great young violinist's fame the public had been informed that his fee for a concert was never less than a thousand and sometimes as much as two thousand dollars. "Not bad, eh?" Mr. Ballard, Real Estate, had said to Mr. Ainsworth of Wells, Fargo. "Let's suppose that feller gets an average of twelve hundred per evening, and say he plays just twice a week, with three months taken off for the dead season—well, it gives him still a cool ninety-five thousand gross income a year. Just for having fun with his fiddle, while you and me have to do a lot of hustling for every nickel we earn. Maybe I ought to have stuck to my mouth organ!" There was no malice in such remarks, rather a good-natured and amused respect.

"I've seen your picture in the papers, Mr. Ambros, and I've read every word they printed about you," Ann said breathlessly. "It must be simply wonderful to be so famous, Mr. Ambros." She had gleaned from the *Ladies' Home Journal* that the best way to a man's heart was to flatter him at any and all occasions. It seemed you couldn't put it on too thick and, accordingly, Ann looked up to Ambros in unconcealed adoration, pressing her free hand to her still too small bosom as if almost but not quite swooning. Mr. Ballard chuckled at his little daughter's attempt at acting the lady but Mrs. Ballard frowned, because children were not supposed to monopolize the conversation. "Why don't you go and get your autograph album, dear? The child is collecting autographs, Mr. Ambros. She's got President Cleveland and Mayor Sutro and May Irwin—and whom else, Annie? Haven't you got John Drew? I'm certain Mr. Ambros will let you have his, too, if you ask him nicely."

"I shall be greatly honoured to find myself in such splendid company," Ambros replied, and Ann sensed the sheer embittering sarcasm of it.

"I've stopped collecting autographs long ago," she said quickly. "It's silly, don't you think so, Mr. Ambros? I mean it's all right for little brats, but——" and suddenly she threw short skirt, ribbed stockings, and all the rest to the wind and the young woman into whom she had matured while he was holding her hand looked full into his eyes and said enticingly: "It would be different if you wrote me a letter; a real letter from you I should accept with pleasure."

"Thank you, Angelina! But if I wrote you a letter—would you answer me?" he said, pulling out his golden cigarette case, as if to cover up some unspoken secret between them. "Do you smoke, Mrs. Ballard? Miss Maud?"

"Mercy, how would I? And my daughter—the very idea, Mr. Ambros!"

"And why not? My mother smokes constantly; cigars, at that. I fear I have inherited all her vices and none of her virtues."

It was at this point that Maud pushed herself into the conversation. "I saw your picture, too! I think it was dreadful; not a bit like you," she said.

"Why, Maud, how can you say such a thing," Mrs. Ballard called out, appalled, and Maud subsided while Mrs. Ballard was sailing ahead. "I'm so glad Mr. Ballard bought tickets for your concert early enough, it's been sold out two weeks in advance."

"Well—er—I hope the programme I am playing will not bore you too much, it is a bit heavy," Ambros said, instinctively glancing at the grand piano with the fringed Spanish shawl, the clutter of silver-framed photos, the little marble cupid aiming his dart at the world at large; with its abundance of mother-of-pearl inlay the instrument looked like a rich, fat, overdressed widow. It was a very expensive grand piano and blatantly unused.

"Oh, you mustn't say that, Mr. Ambros, I'm sure we'll all love your programme, especially now that we know you in person," said Mrs. Ballard, always ready with a few drops of rancid conversational oil.

But Ambros had not heard her; he was still preoccupied with his programme. "Mr. Lombardi warned me not to play the Beethoven concerto, he claims that San Francisco is not

used to such serious music, but, *Herrgott*, what do they expect me to play? Only trash? Only *Schund und Kitsch*? Paganini? Sarasate? Vieuxtemps? That sort of thing I play very badly and I simply will not do it just to please any Signor Lombardi. It is Bach, Mozart, Beethoven—or nothing.”

“I love the Beethoven concerto,” Maud said unexpectedly, “I can’t hear it often enough. Sir Hyman played it in one of his musicales, two years ago, and I pestered him to play it privately some more for us, a friend of mine who studies with him and me. There is that one melody in the second movement—it goes through and through—”

“Yes? *Nicht wahr*, it does, Miss Maud?” Ambros said with a flicker of interest, but Maud dried up immediately and would not speak another word.

“Maud is very musical,” Mrs. Ballard explained; “she’s had piano lessons ever since she was seven. Maybe you want to play something for Mr. Ambros, dear?”

“Oh, please, do not trouble yourself,” he said hastily. “And Angelina? Is she musical too?” he asked, and his left eyebrow, the arrogant, sarcastic one, went up.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Ambros, I can’t do a single trained-monkey trick. I can’t play a thing. But I love to listen——”

“Good. During the concert I shall tell myself, Miss Maud likes Beethoven, and little Angelina is listening, and I shall try my best to please you.”

“In fact we did not intend to take Annie along, the child is so excitable,” said Father. “Dr. Bryant wants her to be in bed by nine o’clock at the latest. She is very delicate, our little girl, very delicate, aren’t you, Annie? No, we didn’t plan on taking her to the concert.”

The tears shot hotly into her eyes but she caught them in her eyelashes while she kept on smiling her bravest and most touching little smile. Ambros couldn’t help but notice it and once more he took her hand into his. Not Maud’s hand, for all her bragging and blustering about Beethoven, but Angelina’s. “Mr. Ballard—and you, too, Mrs. Ballard: if I beg you very nicely you will make an exception this one time, *nicht wahr*? I shall play much, much better when I know that little Angelina is in the audience,” he said.

It was as near a declaration of love as a gentleman dare make to a young lady in the presence of her parents. . . .

Of course Annie arranged to be taken to the concert; she had overruled Mrs. Ballard's objections, wheedled Maud into letting her have last year's pink taffeta with the ruffles, bribed Miss Adams, their old seamstress, into fitting it for her and filling out the front with tiers of ruching, and finally she had overpowered Father by the sheer delight he took in seeing his little daughter in her first long dress. From the moment the family entered the Tivoli she felt that all eyes were on her and every rustle and whisper of the crowded house was a comment on her glorious prettiness. She was giddy with excitement, the small bunch of roses in her hair trembled incessantly, her face was burning while her hands in the white kid gloves grew colder and colder; of the music she did not hear much because she was too busy letting everybody see how enraptured she was listening. There were moments, though, when she felt as if Florian Ambros' fingers were not playing on his violin but on some vibrating strings within herself. She did not know then—and not for many years to come—that she was jealous of his violin. The way he was caressing her (for to Angelina that singing instrument with its curves and narrow waist and long slender neck had immediately become a She and a rival), the way he picked that fiddle up ever so gently, bedding her on a soft white silk pad on his shoulder, tucking her under his chin, bending his ear to her as though she were whispering sweet secrets to him; the way he gave her all his attention, fondling her even during the brief intervals when he was not playing but let the moth-eaten old creature at the piano tinkle on by herself: it made Angelina wish bitterly to change places with that stupid piece of wood. All the time she was waiting for him to notice her, third row, centre, give her a sign of recognition, a smile, a wink, something to single her out for the whole audience to see. But Florian Ambros on the concert stage was completely different from the elegant young gentleman he had been on his improvised visit to their music room. In the hard reflection of the footlights, his face changed to a pale, sharply cut mask with black holes for eyes, he had become a deadly serious stranger, a fierce sleepwalker who almost frightened her. Only when the applause came down upon him like a polite cloudburst did he seem to wake up and be his princely self again, bowing from the waist, raising his arrogant left eyebrow, and smiling into the audience as though he had just shared a good joke with them. Ann jumped from her seat, cheering and waving to catch his attention, but Mrs.

Ballard pulled her quickly down again and Maud muttered irritably: "Oh, for land's sake, Sis, don't act like a baby." Mr. Ballard, very smart in his tailcoat and smelling divinely of the brilliantine on his beard, put a consoling, white-gloved hand on his little girl's shoulder. "There, there, what's the matter, Annie? The child is all a-tremble, Mama."

"I knew it would be too much for her! I shan't be surprised if she runs a temperature by tomorrow," said Mrs. Ballard.

"Shush," Maud silenced her parents as Ambros was making an announcement: "Now I shall with your kind permission play Bach's Air on the G String for you."

"For you——" he said, suddenly directing his smile at the third row, centre, as if he and Angelina were alone and no one else counted in the entire sold-out theatre. While he was playing the lonesome piece she was making rapid progress; she had already married him, together they travelled to New York, London, Paris, and Rome, she spoke French like a native, she was presented at Buckingham Palace and, gracefully yet with dignity, she rejected the gay Prince of Wales's proposition to become his mistress. She wore a gown of the finest alençon lace with a train five feet long, and a sensational string of pearls, and wherever they went people whispered: "That's her, that's Mrs. Ambros, that's the lovely young bride Florian Ambros brought himself from America——" and then the encore was played out and people left their seats and pushed forward to the footlights to clamour for another and yet another encore.

For this town had a gargantuan and indiscriminate appetite and a very good digestion; fourteen-course meals, magnums of champagne, beauty represented by a host of lively, ample-bosomed women; art in the shape of countless marble statues and bronze figures, a lusty, overflowing too-muchness of everything. The town read books, the thicker the better, filled her shining new libraries with classic, religious, and profane literature by the yard; the town adored the stage in all its forms, from vaudeville and minstrel shows all the way up to *Hamlet* and *Tristan and Isolde*; the town gratefully devoured music, whether it was a march played by a brass band or a Beethoven concerto played by Florian Ambros. But always, warmly and innocently, San Francisco loved the artist more than his art, the actor more than the drama, the virtuoso more than the music he interpreted: the person more than the work. Ambros' programme had indeed been too serious for the local

taste, and the clamour for more and more was the clamour of children who refuse to be sent from the table without a good measure of sweet and fluffy dessert. But at last the asbestos curtain came down, the gas-lit chandelier was turned off, and the evening had come to an end.

"Come on, little chicken, Beatrice is waiting outside; I'll take you to the carriage while Mama and Maud go backstage," Father said, touching her shoulder and holding her cape to wrap her up. Ann's cup had been overflowing with sweetness but now it turned to vinegar. She had known all along that her parents and, infuriatingly enough, Maud too were invited to a reception Mr. and Mrs. Bensinger were giving in Florian Ambros' honour; but it had not occurred to her that they intended to pack her off and send her home like this. If she could not show herself to Mr. Ambros in her long dress the whole evening made no sense; God alone knows what dizzy hopes her fifteen years had pinned on his seeing her, so lovely, so grown-up, a full-fledged lady down to the whispering taffeta frillies inside her skirt; and now this crushing disappointment, this unbearable indignity.

"But—but, Father—that's simply impossible—I must at least thank Mr. Ambros—he will think I'm neglecting him —" she said with strained self-control and quivering lips.

"Fiddlefaddle! Mr. Ambros doesn't know you're alive. He has other things on his mind. I dare say Mr. Ambros wouldn't like it one whit if everybody were dragging their children into the greenroom!" Mrs. Ballard said, callous and exasperating as ever.

Ann gasped, an ice-cold shower was unexpectedly turned full force on her, every inch of her froze and cramped, and she coiled up in a hard knot of desperation and defiance. "What makes you so sure Mr. Ambros isn't waiting for me to come backstage?" she said, choked.

"Oh, for Pete's sake, don't kick up a fuss. You should have been in bed for two hours. Take her out, Mr. Ballard, don't let her make a public spectacle of herself," said Mrs. Ballard.

As far back as she could remember, Ann Ballard had disliked her mother, her creaking corsets, the too white rice powder on her shiny blunt nose, her turning purple after each heavy meal, and her indelicacy in general. Indeed, as a little child she had harboured vague dreams of being a foundling laid down at the Ballard doorstep to be someday

triumphantly revealed as a child of much finer and higher descent: a Crocker child for instance, a Huntington, or even one of the La Torres of Menlo Park. The Ballards, while they were good people and rich people (downtown it was said that Charley Ballard was well past his first million), definitely were not of the First Set and the Selected. For this, Ann blamed her mother, who seemed incapable of quite shaking off Smith's Hardware Store on Polk Street where she came from. In spite of her ambitious race against the Bensinger clan, Mrs. Ballard, née Smith, remained second-rate. Her skin was too healthy, her voice too penetrating, her coiffure too perfect, her manners just a trifle too correct, the menus of her dinner parties just a bit too rich, and her charities too opulent. San Franciscans, for all their easygoing, wide, and handsome Western living, were not really impressed by wealth. They knew that any fellow with a bit of brains and gumption could make a heap of money quickly enough—and lose it with equal speed. An old family (which meant a family that had settled on the sandy hills some twenty or thirty years ago)—that was something else again. You either belonged to one of these families or you didn't, and there was nothing you could do about it. Tonight, after years of friendly hobnobbing with the Bensingers on committees and at official functions—and various most politely veiled and sugar-coated rebuffs privately—was the first time that the Ballards had been admitted to the more intimate enclosure of the Bensinger home. "You only got that invitation by hanging on to Mr. Ambros' coat-tails—and then you won't even let me go and thank him," Ann whispered, stifling a sob.

The family knew how frequently little Annie was subject to crying spells; it was part of her being so very delicate and sensitive and also a little anaemic. No tantrums ever, no loud outbursts, no tooth-and-nail fights—just the clear, easy, silent tears streaming down her angelic face, hard as she might try to suppress them.

Mr. Ballard ushered her out as expediently and gently as possible. "There, there, pull yourself together, Annie. It's not as important as all that, is it? You should be happy to be as young as you are—I know a lot of people who'd give a cool million if they could be fifteen again." And with that they had reached the foyer and there Beatrice was waiting, unkempt, broad, swarthy, shabby in her old black shawl, as she had been waiting all through Ann's life to take her home:

from school, from dancing lessons, from rewarding visits with Grandma Ballard in Belvedere, from the happy uproar of children's birthday parties. "And listen, Beatrice, Mrs. Ballard says to give the child a glass of warm milk when she's in bed. I'm having the carriage starter call for O'Shaughnessy now—no, we don't need him, we're going to the Bensingers' in Mr. Ambros' carriage—well, good night, my sweetheart, nice dreams," Father said and was gone, taking with him some warm security and leaving only a whiff of his brilliantine.

"Pick up your skirta lika lady, no bunch dem up, no more higher, lady show da frillies but not da feet," admonished Beatrice, wrapping herself around Ann like a protecting wad of cotton and pushing a path for her towards the carriage.

Outside the Tivoli there blew and whistled one of San Francisco's ferocious, howling, early spring nights. It was slapping the street lamps with rags of fog and making the horses steam in the cold and the carriages shine with moisture. In spite of it, the usual crowd of loafers and onlookers was blocking Eddy Street. There were urchins of every age and description, poor women in shawls to gape at rich women in elegant gowns, a few mashers to snatch a glance at petticoats and well-turned ankles; there was Gimpy, the legless beggar, and Rosaria, the three-hundred-pound flower girl with the stormy past, there was among the crowd the usual percentage of drunks, a merry and democratic fraternity of workmen's caps mingling with lopsided silk hats. From the water front a sprinkling of sailors and longshoremen with their girls had been swept here, to stop for a moment of curious goggling. There were newspaper boys, shrill and hungry as predatory birds, there were Irish and Italians and Mexicans and Jews and Chinese and Japanese, and a few dark-skinned individuals of uncertain descent, backwash of this great port; and also a few fancy ladies willing to join some lonely music lover in need of emotional release after the concert. It was a loud, lusty, hearty cross-section of the town, a pushing, teasing, whistling, joking, laughing crowd full of cheer and simple good nature in the midst of the cruel night.

It was the first time Ann had been out on the street so late, because up to that evening she had been allowed to attend matinées only, and the milling and shouting and general crudeness of the mob frightened her a bit and yet this, too, was part of the new intoxicating things that had been

happening to her ever since Florian Ambros had called her Angelina. . . .

And then the Ballard carriage pulled up with good old O'Shaughnessy on the box and Beatrice, spreading her black shawl like bat wings, shoved Ann into the darkness of the coach. It was a heartbreaking moment when they drove off, jerkily over the cobblestones, and into quiet, empty Taylor Street, farther and farther away from Mr. Ambros. Ann nestled up to Beatrice, sniffing the familiar odour of that old black woollen shawl as a kitten might sniff and be at home in the warm scent of the mother cat's fur. It was still the same shawl in which Beatrice, more than fifteen years ago, had made her entrance into the Ballard home.

Ann was thoroughly acquainted with every detail of Beatrice's autobiography because, as Ann was growing up, Beatrice had considered it her duty to introduce the girl to some of the forbidden and never-mentioned things that constantly went on among the grown-ups. It appeared that Beatrice had been "ruined" by a young fisherman down at the Wharf; she had been betrayed and deserted and been left "in trouble". It was the ever-same, the oldest, ballad of the world and while it was all very sad it also sounded as if it had been a lot of fun for Beatrice. When she told about her time with Aurelio, the sun was always shining, the wild iris was blooming in the hills, and there was a full moon every single night.

"Was there no fog in San Francisco when you were young, Beatrice? Was it never too cold to go to the park and lie down in the grass?"

Beatrice refused to admit this. "No, no, no, always I remember da sun she shine, Piccolina mia, maybe I forget about da bad weather. When I am cold, Aurelio he ruba my hands, he take offa my shoes, he ruba my feet, he holda me tight; but in da end he run off an' marry dat woman in Sacramento, she has da little restaurant, she call it Margherita's Grotto, she make a waiter of him and Beatrice is left with little Benedetto—"

And so little Benedetto had died after a few days and Beatrice had thrown the full load of her unused love upon Anna, had wet-nursed and fed her and coddled her and brought her up ("We just didn't have the heart to send her away when Annie went to school," Mrs. Ballard would explain; it had an elegant sound of loyalty between master and old retainer). Beatrice would wash Annie's face with

milk and her blonde hair with camomile and borax, and oil her little hands and nurse her bambina's beauty for the time when she would come out. She would pamper her and spoil her and indulge her, and there was a constant tug of war between the forces that wanted to educate Ann Ballard and Beatrice, who only knew how to love her. . . .

The fog had grown so thick that nothing beyond the nearest street lamp could be seen and the carriage seemed hardly to move as the horses laboured their way up towards California Street. Ann's sniffing grew louder, but much as she wanted to cry it would not develop into a real sobbing, her throat was full of grit and her eyes remained dry. "Whata say Mr. Ambros when he see you in your fine long dress, Anina? I bet he say Angelina is da most beautiful little lady in San Francisco."

"Oh, be quiet! If you speak another word I'll scream. If he weren't such a sap he'd have refused to go to the Ben-singers' without me."

"You no likea Mr. Ambros no more?"

"I hate him!" Ann said. She was trembling like a beaten horse. Beatrice pulled her closer into the warmth of the shawl. Suddenly the Italian odour of that old shawl—oil, charcoal, smoke, onion, fish, Beatrice's warm earthy body scent—grew insupportable.

"What'samatt, what'samatt, Piccolina mia?" Beatrice asked, alarmed by a small sound emanating from Ann's constricted throat.

"I think I'm going to be sick, Bea, I feel it coming. My stomach hurts so—oh, I'm getting sick, tell O'Shaughnessy to stop, quick——"

Thus ended the great evening when Ann Ballard wore her first long dress and heard Florian Ambros play in a concert for the first time.

By general request a second concert was announced and for a few days Florian Ambros was the rage of the town, the topic of much gossip at Ladies' Pink Luncheons, of serious appraisal among the gentlemen in the bars and saloons of the smart Cocktail Route, of deep and esoteric discussions among the Bohemians, and of enthusiastic revues by the critics, comparing him to Franz Ondricek and Eugène Ysaye, who had

been the vogue of the last few years. Only one sorehead wrote that Ambros' rendering was perhaps more studious than inspired and that his tone quality could be improved. If Ann had been a man she would have gone straight to the newspaper building on Montgomery Street, would have slapped her gloves in this idiot's stupid face or even tweaked his long unfriendly nose and afterwards killed him in a duel. In the meantime the Ballard family sailed merrily along on their new friend's success and popularity. The five days between the two concerts were a continuous fiesta, almost better than the World's Fair two years ago. There were invitations and an enormous dinner party in the enormous Ballard dining room full of pheasants—painted ones on rich still lives and roasted ones on huge silver platters—a party to which everybody came; everybody, that is, but the Bensingers, who asked to be excused on account of one of Mr. Bensinger's regrettable attacks of asthma. Ambros was Shown the Elephant, as sight-seeing was called in San Francisco. The Golden Gate Park, the Cliff House, the Seal Rocks, the Presidio; sometimes Mrs. Ballard went along and sometimes she let the two girls and their guest drive off with only Beatrice as chaperone and O'Shaughnessy as lifeguard. After office hours Mr. Ballard would take over and guide Ambros through the more masculine preserves, the clubs, the bars, the restaurants, the haunts of Chinatown, the lanes, the dives, the pawdy houses, and deeper and deeper into the world-famous squalor of the town. The gambling halls and opium dens, the miserable cribs of Morton Street, the three blocks of gaudy, shabby, dirty amusements comprising all of the much talked-of Barbary Coast, were pointed out to him with a queer local pride at being reputed to be the wickedest city in the world.

"Amazing," Ambros would remark and rub the ever-blowing sand from his eyes. "It is a truly amazing place—and to think that this whole town is not as old as my own mother! Skyscrapers! Cable cars! Electric arc lamps! Now consider my own Vienna. It has been standing there ever since the Romans founded it, roughly eighteen hundred years ago; but has it a single skyscraper? Indeed not. On the other hand, the tower of our St. Stephen's Cathedral—and you will forgive me for bragging a little—is as high or possibly even a trifle higher than the Call Building. The stonemasons of the thirteenth, fourteenth century built it, stone by stone, with their own hands and by their faith only——"

You never quite knew whether he was making fun of you, and sometimes Angelina suspected that he took nothing serious but his fiddling. "Forgive me for being a crashing bore," he would call out, "but no more temptations for me, no more indulgence!" He stretched his arms before him and stiffly spread his fingers, watching them with a sharp, suspicious and menacing frown: did they dare tremble or shake? No, they did not, and he took a deep breath of relief. Forthwith he withdrew into himself, he refused all liquor, but he was incessantly smoking the bitter Egyptian cigarettes from his impressive golden tabatière, gift of an archduke, as the Ballards had found out. He seemed unable to sit still during this interval between the two concerts; throwing back his shoulders and claspings his hands behind his back, he would prance up and down before the demurely seated Ballard ladies and try to make himself understood. "Concentration! Practice! Discipline, discipline! You know, Miss Maud, what discipline means to us musicians? *Au fond* we are all circus performers, ropewalkers, precariously high up in the top of the big tent. *Herrgott*, what a dangerous profession: playing the violin, what a thin, slack rope this bit of success! It is true, we do not break our necks if we fail, but, Jesus Maria, I would rather break my neck than botch the Beethoven concerto. You do understand that, Miss Maud, *nicht wahr?*" At which Maud, looking at him with her sleepy large cow eyes, obediently answered that—yes, certainly, Mr. Ambros—she understood.

When he complained about the noise and unrest at the Palace, Father invited him to practise in their music room and he accepted the plush-smothered asylum with eager gratitude. Mr. Ballard, although loudly declaiming that he was unmusical as a sewer pipe, had a hidden, deep-seated, and shame-faced love for music, probably a carry-over from some of his German Bollert forebears. And so the Spanish shawl, the marble cupid, and all the other clutter and cluster were cleared away, a piano tuner was called in to put the instrument in workable shape, and every morning at nine o'clock sharp Florian Ambros, carrying his violin case in tender arms, emerged from a cab and slipped as unnoticed as possible into the music room. Like a scurrying shadow, his lady accompanist followed him, a small, nondescript, oldish creature with the alert, intelligent large eyes of an owl. "This is Mousie—simply Mousie," he had introduced her with startling informality. "She is awful. She slaps my wrists when I do not play

to her taste." At which Mousie had shaken hands with all four Ballards, surprising them by the almost manly force in those small, broad, short fingers. Mousie was always dressed in black garments that looked like—and probably were—hand-me-downs, and she was never heard to speak a word when the family was present. Angelina came to the conclusion that Mousie was either a deaf mute or a moron who did not know enough English even to bid the time of the day. But Mousie was eloquent enough on the piano, and quite frequently the music behind the closed portières of the music room would stop and give way to the sounds of a forceful and adamant dispute in German or French.

It was not fair that Maud could stay home and have the field to herself during that exciting week, while Ann had to trot off to school. Miss Fishbein's Lyceum for Young Ladies was an abode of boredom, and reading *Hamlet* with postal stamps providently pasted over all Bad Words was no fun at all; ever since Ann had been enrolled there she had become what Dr. Bryant diagnosed as delicate. Whenever things went against her, Ann would visibly will away, turn pale, with a pattern of pulsating blue veins on her suddenly transparent temples. There were many small fevers, attacks of sore throat and upset stomach, she would refuse to eat, and the milk Mrs. Ballard poured into her with grim determination Ann soon returned under much retching, perspiring, soft moaning, and with the resigned smile of a suffering saint. She was searching frantically for a reason to stay away from school. But evidently these were no times to get a sore throat. Going home from school, the cable car, rumbling and grumbling and clanking up California Street on its snarling rails, seemed much too slow and she was unfriendly to Johnny O'Shaughnessy, who still—as in that forsaken past—before Ambros—was waiting for her at the corner, to carry her satchel and join her for the ride.

Johnny, old O'Shaughnessy's boy, was just finishing his last year at high school and in his spare time he served as man-of-all-work at the Ballards': mowing the front lawn, keeping the boxwood hedges trimmed, cleaning up perilous second-floor bay windows, repairing the many kerosene lamps, doctoring dripping taps and clogged-up pipes, and oiling the girls' bicycles. Dressed in Mr. Ballard's discarded cutaway and sporting white cotton gloves on his big hands, he would also open the door for the guests at parties, and at such special occasions as required the Ballard ladies to be represented in

great style, he even acted as their footman. At seventeen Johnny was tall and strong, very much of a man, and just in the process of nursing a proud red Irish moustache into being. He was Ann's declared, devoted, and adoring slave and Ann, in turn, considered him a useful piece of personal property; she would have missed him, had he not been waiting for her at the corner; but on the other hand, since she had known Ambros, Johnny irritated her: he was coarse and freckled, a silly leftover of her childhood and a nuisance.

When Ann entered the house, an ever-repeated, ever-accelerated violin passage announced that, thank heavens, Mr. Ambros was still there. She raced upstairs, calling for Beatrice to come and help her, quick. She dropped her obnoxious school uniform, changed her garments down to the very skin; she put on the ruffled petticoat of Swiss embroidery that should have been reserved for Sundays only; unbraided and brushed her hair; pinched a bit of colour into her cheeks, had Beatrice rub rose water and glycerine on her hands and fluttered them with raised arms to make them still smoother and whiter. And thus, embellished and expectant as a Persian bride, she slipped into the music room.

"Wer ist da? Hergott, was willst du denn schon wieder?" Florian Ambros shouted in a hoarse and incomprehensible German: the sleepwalker, called out of his trance, dangerous, on the moonlit edge of the roof . . .

"It's just me—I mean it is only I. Please, oh, please, may I sit and listen? You don't know how much it means to me."

"All right—but sit down over there where I cannot see you, otherwise it is impossible for me to concentrate."

These were strong words, highly flattering and almost too passionate, it seemed to Ann. She made herself very small so as not to disturb him with her distracting presence, and Ambros resumed his work. It was the same obstreperous passage, with infinite patience and monotony repeated over and over again; to Ann this didn't matter, as she didn't listen, she only looked. She had to study the man who would someday be her husband. Playing the fiddle, he became a stranger again, a mysterious creature, a man from Mars, but, oh, so fascinating. In the morning he did not wear his slim Prince Albert but a rather tired black velvet jacket and even this he soon flung to the floor with an enraged German curse. His black necktie followed, his large round golden cuff links, his soft, low collar, and in the end he was working in rolled-up shirt sleeves, his

hair a black wilderness, his face pale and glistening with perspiration. It was, Ann thought, taking a hurdle, a *naked* face; Mrs. Ballard had warned her daughters never to use that indecent word but to circumvent it daintily as "being in the altogether." But to Ann, defiantly and crudely and with a curious sense of intimacy and ownership, it was a *naked* face. No beard, no moustache to hide his mouth, his arrogant, sardonic and yet melancholy smile, the strange expression at once fierce and tender when he was making love to his violin. "There is always something going on in his face," Ann told Beatrice. "He looks like an actor——"

"Uhu—or like a headwaiter," Maud remarked, unasked; she was constantly finding fault with Mr. Ambros, but Ann decided to ignore her.

"I'm simply ignoring you," she informed this loathsome older sister of hers.

"What's the matter with you two girls?" Father asked at supper. "Are you not on speaking terms?"

"The brat is pestering Mr. Ambros all the time. She sticks to him like a burr, she won't leave him in peace even when he wants to practise. She's getting on his nerves, Father."

"What's that? Did he complain about her?"

"He's too much of a gentleman to complain outright, but he indicated it."

"That's a lie—she's lying, Father——" Ann said desperately. The ready tears rose into her eyes and her throat was constricted.

Maud watched her coldly, unmoved by her being so small, so defenceless, and so deeply hurt. "There she goes: the same old act. The Wounded Gazelle. For heaven's sake, why don't you chuck it, Annie?" was all she said.

Father looked from one of his daughters to the other. "Come now, girls, what's it all about? Maud? Annie? What's going on here?"

"The Infant has quite a case on Mr. Ambros, that's what's going on," said Maud.

Ann wondered momentarily whether their cook, Lee Ong, might possibly be persuaded to provide her with some slow-working poison from a Chinese pharmacy. Her eyes grew dry with rage as she groped for a deadly retort. "It may not have occurred to you, but maybe it's the other way around. Maybe it's Mr. Ambros who has a case on me," she said grandly.

"Now you're being plain silly. Why don't you try to grow up?" Maud said and left the table.

Maud was unpredictable. The very same evening she gave Ann her coveted strand of corals as a present. "There—take them; they'll look much prettier on you than on me," she said appeasingly. "I'm sorry, Sis—I didn't mean to get you sore at me."

Buying me off? Ann thought but didn't say it. "Oh, that's all right," she replied magnanimously. "Why should I be sore at you?"

"It's just that you're in that tiresome daydreaming age; it's time someone woke you up before you get hurt," Maud said, retreating. Ann got out of bed, pulled down her nightgown, and tried on the corals: Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? Her old admirer, the dressing mirror, assured her that, of course, the necklace looked much better on her than on her sister. To Ann's mind, Maud was rather unattractive, big and broad-beamed like a percheron, hair as coarse as a horse's mane, and those large hands that were perpetually chapped by Maud's silly preoccupation with settlement work and slum babies.

Ann wore the corals at Ambros' second concert and this time he had occasion to see her in all her long-dressed glory, as the reception afterwards was at the Ballard home, and Ann had wangled permission to stay up until midnight and join in the toast to Florian Ambros' success. She was a bit intoxicated and she seemed to run a slight temperature. In the background Beatrice was worrying and clucking, the old black hen. "Go, go away, leave me alone, don't be so stupid." Ann chased her out of the little green conservatory where she had arranged for Ambros to discover her; it was cool and quiet and a little fountain splashed pleasantly into its marble basin.

"Oh, here you are! I was searching everywhere for you. I hope you didn't plan to disappear like Cinderella when the clock strikes twelve, without saying good night to me?"

Ann kept her face lowered and stared at the fat goldfish in the basin; it was an invitation for Ambros to put his hand under her chin and tilt up her head. "Why are you so pensive, Angelina?" he asked, smiling into her eyes. His fingers smelled of cigarettes and gentleman.

"Am I? I don't know. Because you're leaving tomorrow. Of course, to you that means nothing, you're so used to going

away and leaving people behind. People who care for you, I mean—but—well, good night—and good-bye, Mr. Ambros."

"It's not yet good-bye; I'm not as much of a gypsy as you think—and besides, I've made up my mind to stay another few days in San Francisco. I seem unable to tear myself away from this town: maybe somebody put a spell on me, what do you think?"

"I—gosh! Don't you have to be in St. Louis for your next concert?"

"That's all arranged. I'm sending Mousie ahead; she can take care of all those tiresome preliminaries there. That will give me a full week's rest here. I have not had an entire week to myself for several eternities. And, by Jove, I need it——"

"Golly, Mr. Ambros, I don't quite know what to say—but that's wonderful—a week is quite a lot of time, isn't it? Goodness—lots of things may happen in a week," Ann stammered breathlessly. If he asks me now, this very moment, to elope with him, I'll do it, she thought, I'll do it, by God, I will.

"Listen, Angelina: if I were to tell you a secret—would you keep it?" he said into the rainbow tumult of her emotions.

"Of course I would. You know I would keep to myself whatever you want to tell me—cross my heart and hope to die——"

He let go of her face and shook his head, contemplative and amused. "No, you wouldn't. In any case—it's too early to talk about it."

"You mean I'm too young? But I'm not a child any longer, really not, and——"

"And you are getting white around the gills and I must not keep you out of bed any longer; your mother would never forgive me."

He got up from the marble bench, and standing over Ann, he stretched wearily. "*Herrgott*, I am tired, I did not know how tired I am——" He bent down once more, laughing softly. "Don't they always look as if their names were Oscar?" he said

"Whose name?"

"The goldfish. Watch them. 'My name is Oscar,' they are saying, 'Oscar, Oscar——'" and with that he bent still lower and something touched the top of her head—she never knew whether his fingers or his lips—but when she looked up he was just taking out a cigarette and walking towards the fret-

work of the arch that separated the greenery from the hall. "Lord," he said, "I should not have drunk champagne on an empty stomach. Well—good night, my little pink cloud."

Ann spent her days in a dreamy expectancy; something was going to happen, she was not quite sure what, but whatever he should ask of her, she was ready for it. A formal betrothal, a secret elopement, a fight with her mother—and never mind Father, she could always get Father on her side. It was a strange week, with echoes under the high ceilings, with whispering behind the heavy portières, and doors closed in her face, and Maud being more unpredictable than ever, friendly and gay one day and not speaking one single word the next. Via the kitchen and the upstairs maid, Beatrice relayed exciting fragments of conversations to Ann. "Pshaw," Mrs. Ballard had said, "pshaw, how do you know he is not just a fortune hunter, and pshaw on his fame, don't let him flimflam you, just another fiddler and a foreigner to boot," she had said, and "Pshaw on yourself," Mr. Ballard had answered, just as Maggie was serving the breakfast bacon. "I've made enough money to give my girls whatever they set their hearts on, bless them, and, my dear," he said, "if he really loves the girl and she loves him so much, why then——" Mr. Ballard had said and then he had taken two slices of bacon and Maggie just couldn't hang around any longer without making it too obvious.

"I knew it, I knew it," Ann called out, with a great flutter and beating of wings inside her chest, "I knew it, he has spoken to Father, oh, dio mio, Beatrice, what's going to happen next? Will we be engaged to be married before he leaves? Secretly, I mean, at least until I'm sixteen——"

What happened next was the announcement that the Ballards were going to take Ambros on a picnic down the peninsula. San Franciscans were greatly addicted to picnics: there was a gay freedom, a happily romantic atmosphere, about such outings which had induced many a young couple to speak the deciding word and exchange the first kiss with a view towards matrimony. Ann recognized her father's deft hand behind the arrangement and was immeasurably grateful to him. With great zest and gusto Mr. Ballard flung himself into the preparations for the undertaking.

Kelly's livery stables were mobilized because a real picnic was not undertaken in your carriage but in a rented charabanc and Mr. Ballard personally selected the team of spanking bays.

to do honour to the famous guest. Lee Ong, excitable as all Chinese cooks, was in a frenzy of baking hams and roasting turkeys and concocting all sorts of patés and composing salads, while Mr. Ballard picked out the wines to be taken along, and ordered several cases of beer and a few more of champagne; there were cakes and cookies and home-made bread and crackers and biscuits, and there were sacks of charcoal, and hampers were filled and rugs taken out of the moth balls and tarpaulins provided by old O'Shaughnessy—not as if for a simple merry family outing but as though provisions for an army had to be made.

And then, two days before the great event, the blow fell.

"Listen, Annie," Mr. Ballard said, taking her between his knees as though she were still a little girl. "Listen, chicken, I'd better talk to you before you get yourself all worked up about the picnic: you're not coming along, you're going to stay in town and go to school, and that's final. I know, it's a disappointment, but this time it can't be helped. We'll make it up at Easter, what do you say? I'll take you up to the ranch, how's that? We'll go to the ranch, just you and I, just the two of us, and we'll have heaps of fun together, riding and—now don't look at me as if I were cutting your heart out with a blunt knife, it's not as bad as all that, is it?"

But that was exactly how she felt. She felt so terrible that she could hardly find enough breath and voice to protest. "But, Father, that's impossible, you don't understand—Mr. Ambros—the day after the picnic he'll be gone——"

"That's just it. You've monopolized him enough, and it's time you gave other people a chance too. Grown-up people. You're getting too precocious and that's not a bit becoming to a girl of your age. I won't have you getting too big for your unmentionables, and I definitely won't have you on that picnic, and neither will your mother. Now don't cry and don't mope, and don't try to change my mind for me. And that's final."

Ann knew Father too well to make a scene: when Father said it was final, final it was. In a way she even loved him for it; without this diamond-hard core he would not have earned a million and have a street in the Western Addition named after him. But I know who's behind this, she told herself in a white-hot rage. It's Maud. Well, I'll show you. You can't do this to me, I'll show you.

Dry-eyed, she went upstairs, she lay down on her bed, kicked off her shoes, crossed her arms behind her head, and brooded revenge. The dinner gong sounded but she did not move. Beatrice came padding upstairs on stockinged feet and stood worriedly in the door. "Whatsamatt, Piccolina mia? You don'ta feel so good? I fix you da hot chocolate, ycs? Beatrice fix you a zabaglione, no?"

"Oh, go away, leave me in peace. I'm not hungry, I have a headache."

"*Poverina, poverina*, I fix you da cold compress, you feel more better quick, yes?"

"Get out, can't you hear me? Get out," Ann shouted. "*Va via*," she cried desperately, "*Va via*, you old fool!" she yelled. Beaten, muttering to herself, Beatrice crept away.

After a while Ann felt very ill, although not quite as ill as the occasion demanded. She dragged herself to the bathroom, did a little ineffectual retching, and took the thermometer from the cabinet. The bathroom had a stained-glass window, red, blue and yellow disks were quivering on the floor, and she stared at them until they made her a bit dizzy. Moaning softly, she dragged herself back to her bed, stuck the thermometer under her tongue, and waited: 98.4. Normal. Probably the thermometer was not working properly. After a little while the chills came on and her teeth began to chatter. Now I'm really ill, she thought, I'm very ill. That serves them right. Let's see if they'll go and have a picnic while I'm dying.

Summoned by Beatrice, Mrs. Ballard appeared at her bedside. "What is it, Annie? A sore throat again?"

"It's nothing, Mother, really," Ann said, very weak, very pitiful, very gallant. "I just threw up a little. And my head hurts and I'm terribly cold. But I'll be all right tomorrow."

"I guess you ate too much of that chocolate layer cake; I told you so, but you wouldn't listen." Mrs. Ballard put the back of her hand against Ann's forehead. "No fever. Well, Beatrice, if she doesn't get better, we'll give her some castor oil."

Ann wondered if all mothers were horrid or if hers was an exception. She felt dreadfully lonely, deserted, and betrayed. No one understood her, not even Father; no one loved her, not even Florian.

A while later Maud came in, all honey and Florence Nightingale. "What a baby you are to get worked up about nothing. A year from now you'll laugh about it, I promise. Why, we

all go through that awkward stage, but we survive. Remember when I had my crush on that old tenor, Cavaliere Mazzini, who looked like a hippopotamus——”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m sick, I’m running a temperature,” Ann said gravely.

“How much?” asked Maud, reaching for the thermometer on the night stand.

“Not very much; a bit over a hundred,” said Ann, who by some dexterous manipulating had persuaded the mercury to rise a bit.

“That’s nothing. I have over a hundred every afternoon,” Maud said. It made Ann boiling mad.

“Now you’re lying again, you’re always bragging, you are——dishonourable,” she said, outraged. As an answer Maud shook the mercury down and placed the thermometer into her mouth. She straightened up the room, hung Ann’s clothes in the closet, and put her shoes on lasts. After hardly a minute she took the thermometer out and held it under Ann’s nose: it showed a fraction over a hundred degrees.

“You see?” Maud said. “It means nothing. You mustn’t play-act at getting yourself sick. Don’t you see how much fun you’re missing with all your little sick spells?”

“Oh sure, just think of all the fun I’ll be having, staying home all by myself while you’re going on a picnic——” Ann began but her voice broke and she had to stop. Maud shrugged, patted Ann’s head as though she were Jolly the pup, and went away. Then Ann became really ill.

She became so ill that Dr. Bryant was summoned after supper. He stroked his beard and prescribed his usual medicines: soda bicarbonate, hot tea with lemon juice, castor oil if necessary. Gargling with permanganate could never do any harm either. However, if Ann’s temperature should rise during the night, or if other symptoms should appear, red spots, a rash for instance, he wished to be consulted at once. There was, Dr. Bryant remarked cheerfully, a slight flurry of scarlet fever in town. Nothing like an epidemic, but, in any case, it never hurt to use an ounce of prevention. . . .

It set Ann thinking. Most probably she had caught scarlet fever and it really was not fair that a person feeling so ill and miserable had so very few symptoms to show. She could feel the itchy red spots developing under her skin, but if they were to come out only after the family had gone on their picnic they would be of no earthly use. If, on the other hand,

she should by tomorrow come down with that dangerous and contagious disease, the picnic would have to be cancelled. Even her mother, inconsiderate as she was, would not risk going on a picnic while her little girl's life was in danger; it would make too bad an impression on the other ladies. Over these speculations Ann fell asleep, and when she woke up in the morning and no new symptoms had appeared, a plan was springing fully armoured from her head, like Minerva—or whoever it had been in Miss Fishbein's history classes—from Jupiter's marble skull.

She dressed, reported with a resigned and feeble smile that she was all right, thank you, only a bit tired and sort of funny and cold inside, and went to school. Or rather, she did not go to school but, playing truant for the first time in her life—and how many firsts there had been since Florian Ambros had come to town!—she was laying an ambush for Johnny O'Shaughnessy.

"Johnny, you know how fond I am of you, don't you? And you're fond of me too, aren't you? You know, Johnny, there's nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you, we're friends, Johnny, real pals, aren't we?"

"That we are, Ann," Johnny replied with sincere emotion.

"Now if I'd ask you a favour, you'd do it for me, I'm sure you would, Johnny, wouldn't you?"

"You bet your life I would. Anything, Ann, just name it."

"Well—it's like that: I need a lobster," Ann said.

"Holy Mither o' God! What for?"

"Oh, it's only for a joke, don't you see. To put in Maud's bed. Under her sheets. It'll be such a lark, don't you see. I have to get even with her for something, well, never mind what. Listen, Johnny, you go down to Fisherman's Wharf and buy me a lobster. Naturally, I couldn't go there by myself, it's such a terrible place with all those tough Italian fishermen, they're so quick with the knife, but if you are with me, that's different. With you I'm not afraid of anything."

"Looka here, Annie, why don't you ask Lee Ong or your Beatrice to buy that lobster for you? It's getting late, I should be in school by now."

"Oh, Johnny boy, forget your stupid school for once. It's the first time I've asked you a favour and if you refuse it I don't want ever to see you again. I can't ask anyone else because you're the only person in the whole world I have con-

fidence in. You must help me, Johnny, and you must also give me your sacred word of honour that you'll never, never breathe a word about it, never, don't you see, I wouldn't share a secret with anyone but you, Johnny."

Young O'Shaughnessy thought it over. "A live lobster?" he asked at last.

"No. A boiled one."

"A live one would be more fun."

"No, it wouldn't. It would scuttle around and fall out of bed and the whole prank wouldn't come off, and besides, live lobsters frighten me to death. A nice, cold, boiled lobster is just what I want."

Johnny was not a simon-pure idealist. He thought the matter over carefully. "All right," he said at last, "supposing I chuck school today and get you your lobster and give you my holy word of honour never to tell—what do I get for it?"

"Johnny O'Shaughnessy! You wouldn't ask money for doing a friend a favour? You know what they call a man who takes money from a lady!"

"'Tis not money I'm asking for. A kiss is what I want from you."

"Johnny! Now you're being vulgar! Shame on you, Johnny O'Shaughnessy—why, I'd rather die."

And so they went to the top of Telegraph Hill, and in the shelter of the little eucalyptus woods up there young O'Shaughnessy kissed Ann in an experimental but not altogether unpleasant way. Afterwards they descended through the twisted lanes of the Italian quarter into the singing, shouting, laughing, swaying, smelling rainbow tangle of the wharf and Ann got her lobster. Altogether it was an adventure of the first order, but after Ann had bidden farewell to Johnny at their usual corner the worst was yet to come. Behind a not quite respectable house she found herself a dark alley where she might crack and peel her lobster and, crouching on an overturned garbage can, she slowly and deliberately gorged down the repulsive animal.

By the time she got home she was very pale and truly sick and she went to bed directly. She felt very much like throwing up, but with great will power she forced the lobster to stay with her and then she waited hopefully for it to take its effect. What was bracing her up in all her misery was just the one simple thought: I'll show you. If I don't go to the picnic

nobody will. Without me, there just won't be any picnic. I'll show you.

She took her temperature, but it refused to rise, and there followed a few complications with that recalcitrant thermometer. She stuck it in hot tea and the mercury shot up to 108 and she remembered having read that people usually die with a fever of 106. To cool it off she immersed the refractory instrument in the glass of ice water Beatrice brought her and the mercury disappeared into the little ball at the lower end. This, obviously, was a temperature attainable only by dead bodies. But after some experimenting, shaking, rubbing, and various dippings into the hot tea and cold water, she induced the thermometer to show an impressive 104.2.

An hour later she was covered with red spots and splotches swimming like islands in the whiteness of her fine skin, and she turned pitifully to the wall and felt like dying. In the twilight of half sleep she heard her parents whisper with Beatrice and there was Dr. Bryant and his Beard. He shook her and he shook his head and he shook the thermometer and he asked three times whether Mrs. Ballard was positively certain Annie hadn't touched any shellfish, "because, you remember, Mrs. Ballard, the fright she gave us when she was four years old, until we found out that any shellfish gave her a rash?" Mrs. Ballard and Beatrice declared in unison that they were absolutely certain Annie hadn't eaten anything she shouldn't, in fact she had hardly eaten anything at all since yesterday morning and certainly, in any case, you couldn't make the child eat a shellfish if you paid her a thousand dollars. And so Dr. Bryant, stroking his beard and trying to cushion the blow, had to pronounce that it was a pity but it seemed our little Annie was coming down with a touch of scarlet fever after all. . . .

I'll show you to go on a picnic without me. I'll show you, thought Ann.

Maud was instantly packed up and sent across the bay, to Belvedere, where Grandmother Ballard lived in a little country house. Mr. Ballard was also ordered to stay away from the sickroom because he couldn't risk carrying the contamination downtown. From time to time Mrs. Ballard came tiptoeing on careful but squeaky shoes as far as the door, called a few questions, and retreated again; only Beatrice shared Ann's isolation, telling her the old story about Aurelio, and holding fervent conversations with the Madonna. There was no more

violin to be heard in the suddenly silent house and, needless to say, there was no picnic.

After three days the red spots disappeared and Ann admitted reluctantly that she was well again; Dr. Bryant remarked that you could never be absolutely sure of a diagnosis in the beginning of a children's disease but, he added with his professional and somewhat callous sense of humour, better to be careful than dead. Maud returned from Belvedere weepy-eyed, but otherwise quite cheerful. Florian Ambros had left for St. Louis without so much as a good-bye for Angelina, and all that was left of his visit were loads of cold picnic ham and stale cakes.

"Did Mr. Ambros say good-bye to you before he left?" Ann asked Maud.

"Of course he did," Maud answered. "But you spoiled everything for me, everything."

"What was there to be spoiled?" Ann asked.

"You'd be surprised," said Maud.

It was then that Ann had gone and beaten up the dog. That was how it had all started.

London, May 18, 1898

DEAR MR. AMBROS,

I wonder if you still remember the girl whose photograph I am enclosing? Yes, it is I, your little Angelina, and as you can see, I have grown up, although I am still the same ridiculous five foot two and a half and have given up all hope of ever becoming tall and stately like my sister. It was quite a disappointment to the people who care for you that you gave no concert in San Francisco this last season. But I'm always searching the papers and magazines for your triumphs and every time your name springs at me in print I feel very proud to know you. Do you remember those hours when you practised in our music room and I was permitted to be your enraptured listener? The Chaconne by Johann Sebastian Bach—how well I remember every little note of it. And the goldfish you named Oscar. You see what a faithful dog my memory is?

My parents, my sister, and I are making the "Grand Tour" this spring and we girls have prevailed upon our parents to take us to Vienna. Needless to say, I would be most dreadfully disappointed if you were not in Vienna when we arrive. Will you forget the obnoxious brat I must have been two years ago and transfer your friendship to the sensible young woman I hope to be now? Although, in spite of my trying to be sensible, my heart is drum-

ming alarm at the thought of seeing you again. What a silly thing it is, this impatient heart of mine! Will you have patience with it?

As ever,

Yours truly,

ANN BALLARD. For you: Angelina.

At the time when Ann composed this letter it seemed to her quite a fine piece of writing, restrained and yet expressive; but when she found it, thirty years later, among her dead husband's papers, its painful transparency, its grammatical slips, its primitive effort at being alluring, made her laugh aloud.

Still—he had kept it all these years, hadn't he? He had not even lost it when their house on Vallejo Street burned down—and so this silly letter must have meant something to him, after all. . . .

Mrs. Ambros did not know whether it was a minute or an hour that she had been stumbling through the opaque agony of the night. Jesus, I can't go on, she thought, I simply can't, please, oh, please, let me catch my breath, let me think, let me remember, I can't understand the half of it, I want to know what happened and why, why, why to me of all people, me, who never meant any harm to anyone——

About a hundred feet ahead she perceived the figure of a man standing quietly in the fog; her eyes were good, thank you, it was only her ears that had troubled her recently, head noises, an unpleasant buzzing and ringing when she was tired. Well, tired is no word for the way I'm feeling, she thought accusingly as she waved and called out to the man for help. But her voice sounded faint and very lonely, the man did not move, and that frightened her. "Don't be silly, there are no ghosts," she said, and, of course, it was neither a man nor Florian's spirit, just the crooked stump of a dead tree. Grateful for support and a minute's rest, she let her back drop against the rough bark of the trunk. Now let's see, she thought, let's get things straightened out, let me remember what sort of a person he was, Florian, that I fell so hard in love with him. That's the only mistake I ever made; if indeed it was a mistake—wanting him for myself, all of him and always. Great heavens, that summer when we went to Vienna, he had everything to make a young girl lose her head, we didn't call it glamour in 1898 but that's what it was; the shine, the gloss, the fame—he was of a different grain and fabric

from all the people I knew. Maybe that had been the trouble all along.

Green eyes, thought Mrs. Ambros, and with that she began to smile and, as though following a call, she left the barren tree and put herself into motion again, with the image of Florian floating ahead of her, so distinct, so tangible, that she could almost have touched it. Long green eyes, pressed upward at the outer corners by sharp, high cheekbones; heavy eyelids, lashes so thick and long they caught a glint of sun even when the eyes themselves were hidden in the dusk of the deep sockets. Let's see, what else do I remember? He had restless hands, short-cut nails, thin fingers with broad tips (fingers like a frog's, she would tease him in later years); he was constantly stroking, fondling, massaging things, pulling threads out of the sparse green rep sofa in his mother's so-called salon, plucking dry leaves off potted plants, turning the copper coin on his watch chain around and around, a mascot Brahms had given him after a concert. Before a concert he would sit in the green-room, stiff and eyeless like the statue of some forsaken Egyptian king, his hands, encased in the thick woollen gloves his mother had knitted for him, resting cold and frightened on his knees. Angelina had been appalled when she saw him for the first time in all his fear and weakness and she never quite forgave him for it. Maud, on the other hand, was full of sympathy and treated him like one of her settlement babies, while in the background Mousie was heating some disgusting brew over a small alcohol burner to calm his nerves; as if Florian were a woman in labour pains. The chills before and the sweat afterwards, Great Lord in heaven, who'd ever think of the gallons of sweat that are connected with a virtuoso's glamour and fame! Careful, Flori, there's a draught, don't catch cold, put up your collar, close the door, let Mousie carry the music—disgusting!

Angelina watched and studied him; it was confusing because there was not just one Florian Ambros but many of them, all different. Certainly the wretched coward of the greenroom was not the same man as the self-assured, dominating great virtuoso he became the moment he stepped out on to the concert stage. There were two contrasting faces of Florian Ambros, one for his public, the other for private use. Florian Ambros in his years of success and fame was completely different from the pathetic later Florian Ambros in eclipse. He was all of this: polite as a prince and brutal as a

stevedore; obstinately uncompromising in some matters, and almost too compliant in others; cold and passionate; rude and tender; loyal and faithless; too hard; too soft.

"For God's sake, Florian, have you no character?" she would wail at him.

"I'm sorry, darling, but I'm afraid my supply of character goes all into my music; that's the way God made us musicians—inadequate."

The brilliant stranger she had first met in the tasselled, fringed, overfurnished Ballard home bore no resemblance to her lover, her husband, her enemy of later years; nor to the grey-haired, haggard, sick man quietly and unapproachably wasting away in the back room of their shabby apartment. Nor to the Florian who, still polite and yet brutal, inconsiderate and incomprehensible to the last, had gone away and left her a widow. But the worst had been the sharp, knifing, deadly contrast between Maud's husband and her own: the one affectionate, loving, tender; the other sardonic, irritable and obstreperous—yet both of them: Florian.

"What's the matter with us, Flori? Why can't we be happy with each other, now that we're married?" she would cry, reaching out across the nothingness that held them apart. "Don't you love me?"

"*Herrgott*, the same old song: 'Don't you love me, don't you love me, don't you love me?' Yes, dear, I love you and let's stop talking like parrots. I simply have a few other things on my mind just now besides love-making, but you're not interested in anybody but yourself, that's what stands between you and happiness, yours and mine and ours. You can never see anything but the surface, and the surface is always trivial, shopworn, soiled. You, Angelina, only touch the skin, never what's underneath."

"Well, and what is underneath? Did you ever try to peel an onion? Off comes one skin after the other and in the end there's just nothing. It makes you cry and gives you a red nose—that's all," she had answered bitterly. That was in 1912. Maud had been dead more than three years, his first concert in Paris had been a flop, he had cancelled the second, and the money they had spent on an all-out promotion had to be written off.

"*Ach ja*, Angelina, I daresay there is something underneath the skin. A world of nerves and veins, red blood, and the H_2O and sodium chloride tears are made of, all the chemistry from

which music is distilled. Not to mention certain brain cells and the thoughts they produce—the secret wishes—the futile regrets—our ships that never arrived——”

Great Lord, how sick and tired she sometimes was of his high-flowing language and his incorrigible foreign accent and of all her own enervating efforts at shaping him once more into the man he had been before Maud's death, and building up his interrupted career and slipping fame—all over again——

“I can't make you out, Flori, I never quite know where I stand with you. Sometimes it is as though we didn't speak the same language.”

“Well, actually we don't. You ought to have known that from the moment you came to Vienna, remember? You were quite bewildered and just as disappointed as you are now with me. We are two different continents, darling, and whatever we do, there's an Atlantic between us. Always.”

“Don't say 'always.' It makes me so unhappy. Why are you so hard to understand?”

“Am I? I'm sorry, dear. You shouldn't have put a leaden nickel like me in your pocket. Allegro non troppo, a Schubert trio, a Beethoven sonata, chamber music—that's me. A collection of things you don't care for—my background among others. You didn't understand Vienna—why should you understand me? To me Vienna with all its petty shabbiness and great traditions is still home; to you it's a junk heap.”

“Nonsense. You're an American citizen now. You love America, don't you? You love me—or don't you love me? Oh, Florian——”

“Don't cry, Angel, come here, kiss me—Angelina——”

And the quarrel ended as all of them did: in a hungry and desperate embrace on the grave of a thousand buried misunderstandings.

Summer 1898. It was the year when Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph celebrated his golden jubilee, and Thomas Cook's were leading a trickle of American tourists into the festive old town.

“Well, here we are; the Innocents Abroad,” said Mr. Ballard, shaking hands with obvious pleasure and patting Florian Ambros on the shoulder. Maud and Angelina stood back,

well-manneredly waiting their turn—Maud deeply flushed and with a vein throbbing at her bare throat, Angelina white and transparent in spite of all her cheek-pinching before the great encounter. When Ambros saw her, in her lime-green suit that contrasted so becomingly with her fine blonde colours, he seemed speechless for a moment.

“Angelina—but *Herrgott!*—what a beautiful young lady you have become!” he said under his breath, before he remembered to kiss Mrs. Ballard’s hand. This time he did not kiss Maud’s but shook it casually, almost as though she were a boy. “You look much better, Maud, than when I saw you last,” he said, adding for the parents’ benefit: “Maud had a bad cold when I played in Lausanne, but she came to my concert in spite of it.” Maud had spent the past winter in Madame Cecile Revire’s finishing school, the same one to which Mrs. Bensinger had sent her Caroline the year before and in which Annie was to be deposited come September.

Angelina was afraid that Mr. Ambros might mention her letter, but he never did and thus something like a meaningful secret understanding between them was established from the first. In that letter she had mentioned their Grand Tour quite nonchalantly, but actually she had been in grave danger of being left behind in Grandma Ballard’s charge. That she was now standing in the lounge of the Bristol Hotel with Mr. Ambros’ openly admiring glance upon her was a major victory won in a Napoleonic battle.

Confronted with her mother’s plan to fetch Maud in Lausanne and parade her through Europe, Ann had used all her will power not to throw a tantrum, until she had reached her room. “It’s a crying shame and an outrage and if they think they can do that to me—well, I’ll show them, I’ll show them! Mrs. Ballard—well, what else do you expect from her?—but Father, what’s the matter with him? Is he a henpecked husband? Why does he let her get away with murder?”

Jolly, no longer a pup, took to his heels with a yelp, and Beatrice muttered something about men being men and “maybe your papa he musta give in on account he wanta go to da ranch for da week-end.”

“What has our ranch to do with it?”

“*Niente, niente, Madonna mia*, Beatrice don’ta say no’ting, you too young for to undastand, bambina. Now you musta t’ink of yourself.”

"You bet your life I will," said Ann.

She could not help it if her mother's denseness forced her to use a white lie, a diplomatic little trick, from time to time. Anyway, if Mrs. Ballard had not been so indiscreet and nosy she would not have read the letter Angelina hastily wrote and forgot in the latest copy of the *Argonaut* on the hall table. It was addressed to J. W. O'Shaughnessy Esquire—not a school-boy any longer but a gripman on the Sutter Street cable car. Recently Angelina had discovered in herself a gift for writing effective letters, and the one Mrs. Ballard found downstairs, stamped but not posted, was of a shocking eloquence.

JOHNNY DARLING,

I have been thinking of you day and night and although I know it is all wrong I just can't help myself. Yes, darling Johnny, I will meet you tomorrow—at our usual place, the usual time. But you must promise me, Johnny dear, not to be too forward and not to frighten me and not to do anything I would not want you to do.

Your little Annie, forever and a day.

P.S. Each little cross stands for—you know what.

XXXX XXXX XXXX—and more to come.

The gripmen on the cable cars were notably strong and flirtatious and not too seldom some young lady of good family would get herself scandalously involved with one of the handsome lads. The usual procedure in such regrettable cases was to send the silly young thing away, to Chicago, New York, even to Europe, if the family could afford it. After a while the erring daughter would return, fined down, saturated with culture, and too sophisticated for the primitive appeal of a gripman. In fact Caroline Bensinger had been packed off to Lausanne for no other reason, and what did I tell you, my dear, now she is happily married to James Brooks II, of the Menlo Park Brookses.

In consequence, and with the magic power of a flying carpet, her astute letter had carried Angelina all the way from San Francisco to the Hotel Bristol in Vienna. Johnny had served his purpose. I mustn't forget to send him a post card one of these days, thought Angelina.

"Well—here we are," she said.

"Yes—here you are," Mr. Ambros answered, not too brightly. And then, just as on that unforgettable day in their music room, he took Angelina's hand in his (thank heavens, she had had the presence of mind to remove her glove)

and cupped his other hand over hers. And, great God in heaven, there it was, the same thing happened all over again, the electric shock, the tingling sweetness, hot and cold, heavy in the knees, the wanting more of it, more, more, all of it——

"Nice little hotel," Mr. Ballard said benevolently.

"Not to be compared with our Palace, though," said Mrs. Ballard.

"But it has *cachet*," Maud said in her careful finishing-school French.

"You may call it what you want, but to me it looks plain shabby. And I don't quite trust the—er—conveniences," Mrs. Ballard said, blushing through her rice powder. Mr. Ambros was still holding Angelina's hand in his celebrated fingers.

On the boat they had met a certain Mr. Hopper, Clyde Hopper, six feet two, two hundred and ten pounds of Englishman, with a shock of reddish-blond hair above a corrugated forehead, a firecracker of a fellow, all fun, strength, and tall stories. Hopper was a tea planter from Ceylon and he had taken quite a fancy to the beautiful younger Ballard girl. As Hopper was the s.s. *Majestic's* prize catch she had accepted his somewhat ostentatious attentions, had tramped four times round the deck with him every morning, had danced with him, and on a moon-polished night she had permitted him to show her the upper deck. Up there in the thick black shade of the funnel Hopper had grabbed and forcefully kissed her; Angelina had been sincerely revolted by this crude attack, but also faintly pleased by her ability to make men forget themselves. "You are forgetting yourself, Mr. Hopper," she had told him severely. Hopper, suddenly a very small, humble, and repentant man, had asked her forgiveness and awkwardly tried to make her understand how long he had missed the refining company of a lady and his urgent need for such.

In the meantime Mr. Hopper and Mr. Ballard had become quite friendly over a few glasses at the bar and Mr. Ballard spoke with a certain appreciation of Hopper's drinking capacity—"You must hand it to the Britishers, they carry their liquor like gentlemen"—and of his shrewd head for business. It seemed there was a bit of trouble in Ceylon, with some bug or other in the plantations, and Mr. Hopper had come to the United States to inform himself about the chances of moving into sugar. He had thought of Cuba, but there were constant wars and revolutions and no end of rioting and

Mr. Ballard suggested the newly acquired territory of the Hawaiian Islands as a better bet. Angelina noticed an ever so slight attempt on her parents' part to encourage Mr. Hopper in his courtship, and there were indeed a few things to be said in his favour. Mr. Hopper was an Englishman and obviously quite well to do. Mr. Hopper had shot tigers. Mr. Hopper made less ado about his malaria than Father did about a common cold. Mr. Hopper had given Angelina a nine-foot-long python skin as a little souvenir and had shown her a careless handful of star sapphires, expertly displayed in the dusk of his cupped palms. "Nothing to it, down there they're lying on the street," Mr. Hopper was almost a romantic figure: Angelina pictured him lording it over a slew of brown slaves and picking up sapphires as big as pebbles. And the kiss he had taken from her by force had not been an altogether unpleasant experience.

It was amusing to reduce Mr. Hopper with all his terrifying strength and power to a state of feeble helplessness by no more than a smile or a pout. In other words, Angelina felt that Mr. Hopper was the sort of man she could wrap around her tiny little finger any time she pleased.

But the moment Florian Ambros had bedded her hand into the vibrant shell of his long, famous, and well-paid fingers, Mr. Hopper became a figment, all six feet two of him, and dissolved like a puff of smoke. I mustn't forget to send him a post card one of these days, thought Angelina.

"So this is Vienna," Mr. Ballard said when they were on their way to visit Mr. Ambros' mother, the three ladies and their three little parasols crowded into the back of an open landau, locally called a fiaker, and the two men trying to arrange their long legs and polite knees on the vis-à-vis. "So this is your Vienna," Father said with a tourist's willingness to be pleased by the sights. Well, there it was and so what? Grey stone buildings, most of the houses were low and yet most of the streets were narrow and dark. In the park an amazing number of amazingly ill-bred and ill-kept dogs and on the streets a preponderance of conceited slim blue uniforms. A soft air, soft, fuzzy outlines. The chestnut trees stood in little pools of faded, dropped blossoms and the lilac froth had gone sour like yesterday's raspberry mousse. "Not quite as gay as I thought——" Father said, a little taken aback.

"*Du lieber Gott*, why should we be gay?" said Florian. "We are a melancholic race, that's why we make so many jokes,

mostly about ourselves. We're born wise and old and tired and our friends will have to accept us, Miss Maud, dilapidated and disillusioned as we are."

Everything had the same aspect of shabbiness, of having been in use too long, of being in need of repair and a new coat of paint—even the faces of the young people. Also Vienna was dirty. San Francisco, too, had its due amount of dirt, but the San Francisco dirt was different; washed by the fog, filtered by the salty air, swept by the perpetual winds, it was such a fresh new dirt that it might have been brought into town every morning on the fruit and vegetable carts. Whereas the Vienna dirt seemed to have been left there for centuries and the older it got the more the Viennese seemed to like it. There was not a glint, a gleam, a sparkle about the domes of their churches, the monuments in their parks, or the inconspicuous façades of their palaces; as if no one had ever taken the trouble to rub off the greenish, greyish, brownish crusts of the past.

"And where, may one ask, is your Blue Danube?" Mr. Ballard inquired, and, so help us God, Mr. Ambros didn't seem to know.

"Oh, somewhere on the outskirts, where the foxes bid each other good night. I never saw it myself, but I'm told it isn't blue at all, but pea-soup yellow."

"Well, well. I hope Vienna still loves at least to waltz?" Mr. Ballard said, somewhat abashed.

"Yes, I suppose so; there will be some dancing during the jubilee month—the Jubilee Ball, for instance, with the court and all the bigwigs in attendance——" and catching the breathless expression on Mrs. Ballard's face he added nonchalantly: "If you'd care, I could ask Joszi to get you an invitation. It's one of those super-exclusive, super-boring affairs, you know——"

"What a funny name—Joszi. What is he? A gypsy? A fiddler? A dancing master?"

Florian smiled affably into Mrs. Ballard's heated face. "Yes, a bit of all this, so to speak. But basically he is an archduke, Josephus Albertus, one of His Majesty's nephews."

There followed an impressed and prolonged silence among the Ballards, until Mr. Ballard found some stout democratic ground under his feet. "I was told they're all rascals and women chasers, your archdukes?"

"Absolutely. But very likeable ones. I'm quite fond of my friend Joszi, he really knows a lot about music."

"You mean you may talk to him as to anyone else?" Mrs. Ballard asked, stunned.

"Why shouldn't I? In our quartet I play the first fiddle and he the second. We have some chamber music in his palais every Wednesday, you know——"

I had almost forgotten how wonderful you are, Florian, thought Angelina. I would like to kiss you, this very moment; you'd like that, too, wouldn't you? Oh yes, you would, darling——

They rolled across a bridge spanning a malodorous thin trickle of a streamlet in a wide berth and passed along an unbelievably noisy open market, large and colourful like a county fair; they tunnelled their way through the thick, common smells of onion and sauerkraut and fish and cheese and rotting fruit, and suddenly their carriage stopped and Florian said: "Please to descend—that's where my mother lives and we can't drive through the market. I must trouble you to walk a few steps."

Somewhat abashed, the Ballard ladies gathered up their skirts and tiptoed across puddles and slippery cobblestones and wet planks and the moulding refuse of the market. Around them surged the harsh, alien voices of broad market women, bartering, quibbling, singing out their stuff, muscle men with tattooed arms pushed past, and a butcher boy carrying half a calf on his shoulders almost spattered their gowns with blood. They were wondering what they had let themselves in for, and from what obscure and embarrassing depth their elegant friend might have climbed his way to fame.

Their misgivings were growing as Ambros ushered them with a polite gesture through a narrow doorway into the nondescript building behind the market stands. There was a narrow dark little passage, blocked by empty wine barrels and lit only by the red light under an oleo of the Madonna; then came a small yard, more cobblestones, more crates and barrels and handcarts. A walnut tree nodding green over a pinkish wall full of children's dirty scrawls—the same in every language and of such a bold symbolism that the ladies averted their eyes. Just then and there Florian stopped with a happy smile. "You will love this," he announced. "It's called Das Freihaus; in former times it gave asylum to anyone who was persecuted. And look——" he said in a great commotion as they reached another, larger yard. "This is the place where Mozart lived in a little garden house. Remember, Maud? I promised I

would show you one day the very spot where he composed *The Magic Flute*—and now you're really here; I can hardly believe it."

Suddenly Angelina felt left out and the surroundings were not inspiring; right under her nose two men in soiled white aprons were unpacking enormous loaves of Swiss cheese from some crates and the smell of cheese always made her feel a little sick. She linked her hand in Florian's arm to pull him away and looked up into his eyes: "Oh, Florian, I'm so excited, it is almost too much for me; you must show me and tell me everything about Mozart and—and—and Mozart. I feel so ignorant, but you will teach me all the thousand things I ought to know. About Mozart, for instance, you promise?"

Mrs. Ballard, cemented tightly into her high corset, began to huff and puff as the few steps stretched into an interminable wandering across courtyards of every shape and description, through doorways, under arches, along passages, and up and down little steps and stairs.

"You see, the *Freihaus* is a little world all to itself," Florian explained. "A multitude of people live and have lived here for centuries, side by side, rich and poor, high and low, a cobbler on the same floor with a duchess, a woman of ill repute next to a professor of theology, a rich family neighbourly sharing the toilet with a consumptive seamstress married to a shiftless drunkard. I suppose you would call it a democratic way of life——"

To the Ballards, who came from a democracy where not only the part of the town but even the very side of the street where you lived made all the difference in an unbending and unbreakable social order, this house was an incomprehensible curiosity and perhaps even a little shady.

Through another small gate, up narrow stairs, more noises, more smells, all the drawbacks of a small neighbourhood, and they stopped before a low white door. It opened as if by magic and there stood a tall old man in a shabby ill-fitting uniform and with white gloves on enormous hands.

"Die Generalin at home?" Florian asked.

"At your orders, Your Grace. Her Grace is expecting you."

The Ballards were no longer quite so innocent as they had been before their two weeks in London, where they had taken in the sights and met a few fashionable eccentrics; still they were surprised and bewildered when Florian presented them to his mother; she was called the Generalin, for in Austria her

late husband's rank and title were her due share and inheritance. Small, erect, and vivacious, she received her guests in her low-ceilinged salon among the time-darkened portraits of previous Ambroses. With hair like a piled-up dish of shining blackberries ("I am dyeing it with nut extract, an old family prescription, grey-haired women are an eyesore and should be shot at dawn," she declared), with eyes so black and fiery they made Angelina think of prunes in brandy. She clenched a short black thick cigar between the whitest teeth imaginable and laughed with the largest, widest mouth permissible to a woman. This wild red slash was painted an unrestrained, uproarious scarlet, as in San Francisco not even the fast women in the audience or on the stage of the Orpheum would have had the audacity to paint it; her eyebrows were as thick and shaggy as moustaches and her small thoroughbred hands were in constant motion, talking and expressing when words failed her. Gay, wise, and shockingly outspoken, Die Generalin was without any doubt A Lady, although, the Ballards thought, a bit odd, not to say crazy.

Five minutes after Florian had introduced the Ballard family to his mother, the door of the adjoining room opened to a chink in which Mousie's nondescript face appeared, blinking round owl's eyes at him. *Ignoring the visitors, or possibly not even noticing them*, she called a few commanding words in a harsh German, at which Florian jumped up from his chair, muttered something about an important rehearsal—impossible to cancel—be back at four-thirty—and shot out of that door without so much as a good-bye. "Well, there he goes, there you have my Flori in life size! The way he is rushing off you would think he was having a rendezvous with La Valérienne. I'm sure you've heard of her in America, she's the most famous amoureuse of Vienna. But no, it's that fat, bald-headed, bearded, grumpy old man, his teacher, he is after. You know, my son Flori is the white sheep in a black flock, a little snow-white lamb among that pitch-black tribe of the Ambroses. Every single Ambros, five generations back: a soldier, an officer. Flori's four brothers? All in the cavalry. His father, God bless his soul, a good soldier, a good officer, a fine general. And each of my three daughters married to an officer, too. Believe me, Frau von Ballard, it's an expensive sport, having sons in the cavalry and marrying girls off into the army. Yes, and as I was saying, nine years after the youngest girl there arrives this late-comer,

this Flori of mine, well, maybe we had become a trifle careless—and—*voilà l'omelette*! From the day of his birth he wasn't like the others. He was only three weeks old when he tried to lift his head, and you know what made him do it? He had heard the bugler blow reveille. You should have seen the general laugh and swing the boy high up into the air! 'That's it, Cadet Ambros!' he shouted. 'Up reveille! At attention! You'll make a fine soldier someday!' *Jawohl*, but that turned to vinegar, Flori hates the army, he hates the uniform, his shooting is abominable, he can't fence two red pennies' worth, and you should only see him on a horse. *Heilige Maria Mutter Gottes*! He squats on it like a *Quargel*—but maybe you don't know what a *Quargel* is? It's one of those very flat, cheap, stinking little cheeses which bricklayers and such people eat. It's really a disgrace, an Ambros who doesn't care for horses. 'Mother,' he tells me, 'I have only two tools, a left hand and a right, and if I break one of them falling off a horse, it's *fini* for me!' Even as a little boy he was like that, nothing but learning and studying and reading and fiddling his heart away and listening into himself as if he consisted of nothing but ears. 'Are you sure you had no affair with that gypsy fiddler in Temesyár?' the general used to tease me. Well, I might have looked a few times too often at that Lajos while I was pregnant; I wouldn't have done it had I known the result. Or maybe I would—yes, sometimes I think if I had looked a bit more at that *Tsigany*, my Flori wouldn't take his music so serious— Have another piece of *Gugelhupf*, I baked it myself and I tell you a secret: it only turns out right if you take twelve eggs—and how would you like your coffee? For me personally it can't be black and strong enough but perhaps the girls prefer it with *Schlagobers*? No, no, no, Mr. Ballard, for you I have something special—Djuro! Djuro! Bring the bottle of Tokayer I put on the window sill in the kitchen, by now it must be exactly warm enough—and, Djuro, you ox, the Bohemian glasses, you know the ones I mean?

"He's quite a character, our Djuro *Baszy*," she said when the servant had disappeared. "He came to us as my husband's orderly when he was eighteen, a young savage with straw in his hair. I had to teach him to wash, to talk, to serve, everything. So help me God, if I hadn't to take him by the hand and show him what a toilet was meant for and he was crying bitter tears he was so frightened by the flushing pull——"

The Ballards sat entranced. Everything about and around

the Generalin was a contradiction of their concept of high society and elegance and yet—there was something— Unobtrusively they scanned the furniture, so few pieces and such very simple ones, hardly any ornaments or carvings, neither lace curtains nor grandly arranged layers of plush and brocade draperies, no portières between the rooms but only bare white-painted doors; and far from having advanced to electricity the Generalin had not even gaslight in her flat but only two kerosene lamps on the broad commode between the windows.

"A fine piece, *nicht wahr?*" said the Generalin. "The Empress Maria Teresia gave it as a wedding gift to my great-grandmother, and now Joszi wants to buy it back, he offered me five thousand gulden, but I told him, 'No! I'm not in the old-furniture business,' I told him, 'but if you'd give me your violin you may have my commode.' You know, he owns a Stradivari which Flori wants more than anything else on earth or in heaven, but Joszi only laughed about my offer; of course, his Stradivari is worth five times as much as my commode, although both come from Maria Teresia. Nice boy, Joszi, but a devil with the women."

"How very interesting," Mrs. Ballard said obtusely.

The conversation was carried on with the Generalin rattling off her fast and easy and incorrect French (probably she could not conceive that there existed people who did not understand that universal language), and Angelina made up her mind then and there to study French. Maud, hanging on by the skin of her teeth, interpreted the gist of it to her parents and Angelina did not do too badly with Beatrice's Italian, although it was a regrettably vulgar mixture of Sicily and Telegraph Hill. As for Mr. Ballard, he seemed to regain his German by leaps and bounds because the Generalin was a woman after his own heart. And that Mrs. Ballard didn't understand anything was just as well, because some of the Generalin's tales and curses would have shocked her beyond belief.

The clock on the antique commode had signalled the half hour, Florian Ambros had not returned, and Mr. Ballard was growing extremely thirsty for a solid gulp of whisky, a beverage apparently unknown in Vienna. The sweet hot wine made him sleepy and homesick for the Cocktail Route, where at this hour all his friends assembled in the cosy, smoke-filled, dignified bars. Angelina could sense some of this because she herself was thinking of San Francisco at this moment; in San Francisco everybody spoke English and you knew where you

stood, while here you were always confused and in danger of appearing an ignorant fool every time you opened your mouth. For no apparent reason, Mr. Hopper had come to her mind. If Hopper said four-thirty he meant four-thirty and in his sizzling impatience to meet her he would probably be there long before the appointed time. But here she was the impatient one; the minutes dragged by, and after an eternity the bronze clock on the commode cleared its fine little throat to signal that it was five o'clock. And not a glimpse of Florian yet, while the linguistic patchwork of their conversation showed signs of fatigue.

"My Flori forgets everything else when he works with his teacher, who was a close friend of Brahms himself," the Generalin explained, "and that violin concerto is no small matter. Please, you must understand that, Fräulein Maud, and have a little patience. He will be here soon, I'm sure."

"I'm not impatient, madame. Now that I have waited so long I might as well wait another half hour," Maud said enigmatically and Angelina wished she herself understood French a little better.

"Musicians are funny people, Miss Maud," the Generalin was saying, "and music is a funny thing, that much I have learned. You cannot touch it, you cannot see it, you cannot explain it, *au fond* it is nothing. But to a person like my Flori it is everything. To him music is as real as this table, or his bed; or his own shirt. To my Flori music is the only real thing in the world and the rest is—well, of small—of very small importance," and with her eloquent hands she made a gesture that threw all reality in the ashcan and left only a swinging line of music sketched into the air. Meeting Angelina's uncomprehending glance, she continued in Italian: "It is crazy, come to think of it: a boy scratching a few dry guts with a few hairs from a horse's tail. And that's his whole life. And with that he can make you happy and make you cry, sometimes, and make love to you and take you out of yourself——"

"And become famous and rich," Angelina completed the sentence that had remained floating in the air, a fragment, an unfinished poem.

The Generalin chuckled and gave Angelina's hand a swift little pad. "You, Piccolina," she said, "you are a realist, that much I can see. Well, shall we clink glasses to realists and dreamers alike, Herr von Ballard?"

When Florian had not returned by six o'clock, the Ballards

left in total exhaustion, guided by Djuro through the maze of the Freihaus to their waiting fiaker. Mrs. Ballard took a deep breath. "Well!" was all she said.

"Well what, Mama?"

"Well—you'd think with all the money Mr. Ambros is making he could afford a better place for his mother to live."

"We don't understand these people. Maybe she likes it simple. It's at least a place where a man wouldn't always get caught in your darn tassels and stuff," Father replied.

"So it's on account of my tassels that you're going out to the ranch every week-end," Mrs. Ballard said pointedly. "As if a man mightn't get caught by worse things than tassels."

Maud woke up from some placid reverie to remark: "Simple or not, the Generalin has style. She's a grande dame. *Noblesse oblige*."

"Oh fudge! If you want my opinion, that woman is plain crazy," Mrs. Ballard said with finality. Ann had nothing at all to say; for once she was in agreement with her mother.

Vienna was filling up with a multitude of His Majesty's humble and picturesque subjects brought to the capital from all the provinces and countries of the far-flung monarchy to do homage to their venerable old sovereign; the aristocracy left their castles and country seats, and representatives and diplomats arrived from all corners of the world. On the streets every conceivable language could be heard and there were the most outlandish costumes to be gaped at by great numbers of curious and easily impressed tourists.

As for the Ballards, their friendship with Florian and the Generalin had raised them from the flat level of Thos. Cook's Arranged Tours to the lofty planes of High Life. But what made everything perfect for them was the glorious moment when one nice day, on entering the hotel, they encountered the Frankels.

The Frankels were Americans and they were from San Francisco and when you said Sutro Heights they knew what you were talking about, and they spoke a white man's language. It was a meeting of friends lost and errant in the wild dark forests of Europe; and so the quiet, discreet hotel lobby was treated to the exuberant, naïvely happy, excessively noisy

spectacle performed wherever Americans meet in foreign countries. True, in San Francisco the Ballards and the Frankels moved in different sets; the Ballards were to the Frankels what the Bensingers were to the Ballards. They saw each other at official occasions only, in committees, charity drives, community affairs; and it was tacitly understood that after their return each family would come to roost in its prescribed pigeonhole. But for the present this meeting was the luckiest thing that could have happened to either of them, and in a glow of joy, the ladies shrill with delight, the men so moved they had to hide behind loud and terrible jokes, a friendship for life was toasted with a few bottles of champagne. Suddenly Vienna took on a new radiance, now that Mrs. Ballard could parade her new gowns and hats and her staggering connections with the aristocracy before the quick-tongued, swift-eyed Mrs. Frankel. On the other hand, the Frankels knew some German and were familiar with the town, where they still had relatives, and expertly and a little patronizingly they took the lead in all further shopping, sight-seeing, and programme making.

In spite of boasting perhaps a bit too loudly to the Frankels, the Ballards lived in great anxiety; hoping and waiting and praying that Florian might conjure up the all-important invitation to the otherwise inaccessible Jubilee Ball. Three dazzling ball gowns were in the making for the Ballard ladies. Mrs. Ballard hoped to appear in violet satin with twenty-two bunches of silver grapes holding up the French lace flounces around her skirt and the deep décolletage. On Angelina's advice Maud would be dressed in white watered silk which went well with her florid complexion although it made her look just the least bit broad in the beam. Angelina herself had fought tooth and nail for a black velvet gown to point up her fragile blonde beauty. But Mrs. Ballard insisted that only widows or fast women might be seen in black velvet and finally they compromised on blue chiffon, as dark and yet translucent as the sky of a summer night. Sometimes, staring into the mirror with the old fascination, Angelina could become a little intoxicated with herself. That's me, she would say to her own reflection, that's me, so sweet, so young, so lovely. She would caress the skin of her shoulders, fondle her own hair, maybe put a strand of it between her teeth for an exuberant taste of herself. Sometimes she would play at being the Wicked Queen in the fairy tale of Snow White; it was an

old game, and every mirror told her that she was the fairest one and not to bother about Maud, that dull goody-goody Snow White with her cheeks like blood; but in the end the mirrors always frightened her a bit, just as they had in her childhood; in the end the Wicked Queen had to step into red-hot glowing slippers and dance herself to death. . . .

Nervously Ann counted the days left until their departure. One more week and they would leave on their prepaid Thos. Cook's Grand Tour for Budapest, there to enjoy the continuation of the interminable jubilee jublations. At first Angelina had taken it for granted that Florian would accompany them to the Hungarian capital, but once more she collided with one of those chilly little disappointments which being in love with a celebrity seemed to sweep along in its course. Florian protested heatedly that he was dying to show them Budapest. "But alas! I don't belong to myself, I am a slave to my schedule, you understand that, Maud, Angelina, Mr. Ballard, *nicht wahr?*" He looked pale and slightly desperate; his eyes were absent, his hair a jungle, and his hands restless like animals fleeing before a forest fire. "*Herrgott*, I ought to have my programme ready for my next concert tour, but I have been a lazy pig lately and I'm far behind, I'm playing like an old sow, it's a *Schweinerei*, isn't it, Mousie?" And: "*Jawohl, mein Schatz*," was all Mousie had as an answer.

Angelina was furious at Florian, at Brahms and his concerto, at Mousie, at the whole world. Now take a man like Hopper; he certainly would have come to Budapest with them. Indeed, with the slightest encouragement he would have followed them all over the Continent; in fact he still was capable of popping up on their tracks somewhere. But Angelina at that point did not want Hopper. What she wanted was Florian.

In the meantime stands were erected along the route of the great children's parade that was to be the climax of the celebrations, miles of bunting were draped and festooned, and the fever temperature of the town rose by the hour. There were military parades, there was a solemn procession round the old cathedral of St. Stephen's with all the bells ringing, all the pomp and circumstance of the Church, all the purple and scarlet of the cardinals, all the blessings of the Pope's Nuntius,

and all the mysterious smiles of long-limbed Gothic saints carried out from their dark niches into the sunlight. There was a feeling of elated happiness everywhere and yet a strange undercurrent of old age and decay. "The funeral smell," Florian said in one of his blue moods which always descended upon him when his venerable teacher was not quite satisfied. "Beneath the flowers the hearse is hidden. . . ."

Six days, five days until the great Jubilee Ball, and no invitation had arrived. After all her bragging to the Frankels and her writing boastful little postscripts to her San Francisco friends back home, Mrs. Ballard was riding for a fall and she grew even more dyspeptic than usual. "If we can't go to that ball it'll kill me," she declared; her chin was trembling and her hands shaking. "Where do you wish to be buried?" asked Mr. Ballard, who also showed signs of stress and strain. Angelina grew frantic. She too had pinned all her hopes on that ball, on the blue gown, a dance with Florian, a word, a kiss, something deciding and final. Only Maud kept her equilibrium in the impending crisis; but Maud was a complacent cow and, besides, she had not much to lose. . . .

"Well, I take it we won't be at that ball after all," remarked Mrs. Ballard to Florian with a brave show of indifference. Only her nose, shiny like a copper button, gave her inner torment away. "After all, Vienna isn't San Francisco, nobody knows who we are in this town, and so we simple Americans get snubbed by the High-and-Mighty," she said with more than a tinge of Polk Street.

"But, Mrs. Ballard—of course you shall be at the ball," Florian protested, returning from one of his dreamy distances.

"But we haven't been invited," Mrs. Ballard said, almost crying.

"*Ach du grosser Gott*—the invitation! I forgot all about it. Here—I have been carrying it around with me for a week," Florian said, more absent-minded and exasperating than ever. Such a thing could never have happened with Hopper, Angelina thought.

The morning of the great children's parade came up as if God himself were smiling upon the town. The air was sweet and without weight, the trees on the Ringstrasse threw fine merry shadows, and high over the heads of the crowd a forest of flags was crackling on high flagpoles. Thanks to Florian and his friend Joszi, the Ballards had their seats among the select on the stands next to the huge tent of the Emperor..

They could see him closely, a tall, slim, white-haired figure in a white tunic, who at regular intervals lifted his right hand to salute as if an invisible puppeteer were pulling the string that made the old sovereign greet the youth and future of his country. Hour after hour the children marched by, cheering in well-drilled unison, the sun climbed higher, it grew hotter and the rough planks of the benches became harder by the minute. Children, children, and more children, an unbelievable flood of children; it was quite impressive and also of an unbearable boredom. Probably you had to be an emperor trained to the acceptance of such tributes to be able to stand it for any length of time. Under the flattering reflection of her red parasol Angelina felt herself turn white and whiter in the face and a fine film of perspiration covered her skin. She had got up much earlier than she was used to and she had been a bit dizzy to begin with; and when the defile of children kept on streaming past like a river without end; and when Florian kept on paying too much attention to Maud, just as if he had forgotten that she herself existed; and when she felt that she couldn't possibly stand the sight of one single row more of children marching by, it did not take her much of an effort to escape the entire insupportable spectacle. Uttering a small moan, she fainted.

It was rather pleasant, this letting herself go limp and drifting down a floating darkness. Fainting, she had dropped against Florian's arm and at last he became aware that she too was there, after all. Before Mr. Ballard could come to her assistance Angelina had managed to be lifted up in Florian's arms and softly borne away; now out of the row of spectators, now down the steps behind the stands, now towards the next of the ambulance stations providently dispersed along the route of the parade. It was very sweet and restful, particularly when she remembered that Florian ordinarily strictly refused to carry anything but his violin case. He claimed it would ruin his hands and Mousie was for ever trotting after him like a patient beast of burden, loaded down with batches of music and suitcases and the tin box containing his reserve strings. That he was carrying her now without thinking of his sensitive and celebrated hands made Angelina feel very precious. But as she had no inclination to be handed over to nurses and doctors, she felt strong enough at that point to open her eyes. Through fluttering lashes she found Florian's face closely and worriedly and, yes, tenderly bent over hers.

"She's coming to, Mrs. Ballard," he said, and there, most unnecessarily, her mother popped up at her side.

"What happened to me? Did I faint? Oh, how foolish of me—I'm so terribly, terribly sorry——" Angelina whispered.

It had been, to be sure, an improvisation, but quite a successful one as improvisations go. Forgetting Maud and his mother, Florian took her back to the hotel and kept holding her hand and brushing her damp hair from her forehead and muttering sweet little nothings to her. And everything would have been perfect, had not Mrs. Ballard insisted on coming along, with her foot in her mouth as always. "I told you to go easy on the goose liver, didn't I?" and "You see, Annie, that's what comes from being laced in too tight," and she made her take off her stays and pushed pillows under her head and fussed over her and wouldn't leave her alone with Florian for one single minute.

Weak as she felt after her fainting spell, Angelina could easily have stayed in bed and forced her family to postpone the departure for Budapest; but her father, more callous than usual, told her not to kick up a fuss, the trip on the river boat down the Danube would do her a load of good. Since the Ballards had so happily met up with the Frankels, Mr. Ballard was hell-bent on taking in the sights of Europe in their new friends' company and getting his money's worth out of Thos. Cook & Sons. And Mrs. Ballard added with a mean mixture of sympathy and malice: "It would really be too bad if our Annie were not well in time and we had to go to the Jubilee Ball without her."

"Don't worry, Mother, I wouldn't spoil that ball for you to save my life," Angelina whispered, weak but game. To Mrs. Ballard that Jubilee Ball meant the zenith of her life, so far. The smell of the basement stockroom of the hardware store on Polk Street was still in her nostrils, yet here she and her family were going to mingle with nobility and hobnob with personages of royal blood. In her mind she was already composing the lecture she had decided to give for the Thursday Morning Club. And to make it all absolutely perfect, there were the Frankels, to witness and envy the Ballard triumph and tell the folks back home all about it. "We invited the Frankels to have dinner with us on Saturday," she informed her daughter. "It'll be such a treat to them to see us in our new gowns and watch

us drive off to the ball, don't you think so? So you better see to it that you get well, Annie."

"I will, I will, I promise. I'll stay in bed and sleep it off. You see how sensible I am? I don't even ask you to let me go to the opera tonight," said Ann, in whose mind a beautiful though as yet embryonic plan was beginning to take shape.

She seemed to be asleep when they left, but as soon as they were safely off and gone, she jumped out of bed, did things to her face, hands, and hair, dressed very simply but with great care and discrimination, counted her money—yes, it would do for a cab—and was on her way to the Freihaus.

"I'm sorry to be such a—how do you call it, Maud?—a wet rag?—but not six horses could drag me to the opera to listen to *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*! No, I'll stay home and get my teeth into Brahms," Florian had said only yesterday. God himself could not have arranged a better opportunity for that urgently needed and desired tête-à-tête between Angelina and Florian Ambros; and although the audacity of the adventure made her tremble, actually and literally tremble, as she was rolling and bumping in the old cab across the bridge, she would have been a fool not to make use of this first and unique evening of independence.

Bravely she stumbled through the sparsely lit courtyards and stairways of the immense old hovel, but when at last she rang the bell, with a stutter in her heart and a flutter in her stomach, the Ambros flat seemed mute and dark and empty. She listened for the sound of the violin which at other times penetrated the thick walls with such annoying insistence. Silence. And a sudden rage shook her small body as she thought: So he was lying, he didn't stay home, heaven knows where and with whom he is running around at this moment, while I—while I—weak as I am—just to show how much I care for him—Oh, he doesn't deserve it—

She was about to turn around, a beaten army in retreat, when there was a shuffling and scrabbling, and Djuro, sleepy-eyed and in disarray, opened the door. "Is Mr. Ambros home?" Ann asked, walking past him into the dark hall. The old soldier grinned, bowed, pointed, gesticulated, and snapped some report in his barbarian language, conveying to her somehow that Florian had not come home yet, but was expected. "Good, Djuro. I'll wait a little—" Ann said grandly and marched into the by now quite familiar and yet still alien

salon. Djuro lit kerosene lamps and pushed chairs, and after a few minutes he appeared once more, correctly in his uniform and gloves, to bring a glass of wine, some cake, and, in a climax of hospitality, a family album. Ann opened it indifferently and was staring at all of the members of the Ambros tribe, plus their horses, wives, and children. Someday a photo of me will be in this album, she thought suddenly, and there was once more the lovely vision, the Alençon lace, the string of pearls, a bridal veil, a whisper: "That's young Mrs. Ambros—he brought her from America——"

Bent over a photo showing Florian as an awkward fourteen-year-old in a little cadet's uniform, she pretended not to have noticed that the door had been opened. She held her breath, there was such a tumult inside her chest—and what was he going to say to the surprise?

"Waiting for Florian? Mind if I join you?" someone said, startling Ann out of her little pose. It was Mousie, who never before had said so much as "Good morning" in English. Ann was staring at her, astonished and somewhat annoyed. There was generally something about Mousie's appearances as though she consisted of an ectoplasm that under the influence of music took human shape to retreat again into unknown dimensions with the last bar. Mousie had been completely left out of Ann's calculations. "Great mercy, you startled me! I—yes—I wanted to bring Mr. Ambros his gloves—he forgot them in our hotel—how come you speak English all of a sudden?"

"Why shouldn't I? I was born in Brooklyn; went to school there too. Been to school everywhere: China, Turkey, Algiers—came to Vienna when I was twelve. My father was a foreign correspondent—but never mind about me. There's something I've wanted to discuss with you for quite some time, Miss Ballard."

"With me?" Angelina searched her memory for all the careless and revealing things she might have innocently let slip out in Mousie's presence; things not destined for these oldish, large ears with the fleshy, wrinkled lobes that always reminded you of a rooster's wattles. "Discuss? With me?" she asked in growing annoyance.

"Indeed! You see, I want you to take Flori's mind off his work. He's overtraining; he's getting stale and the second movement is drying up more and more. Take him out of it or we're going to have a *débâcle*."

"Take him out? You're being funny, Mousie. How does one get Florian away from his violin?"

"Don't ask me, my pet; if I knew the trick I wouldn't be left a virgin at forty-two. But I've watched you, and if you can't take him out, nobody can. How? That's your affair. Make your big moist eyes at him, be the clinging vine, the lascivious child bride; promise him the dance of the seven veils, play Herodias' little daughter to our saint before he turns the Brahms concerto into sawdust."

"Possibly I don't quite understand your Brooklyn dialect. But—well! I really don't think I gave you any reason for insulting me," Angelina said, very angry.

"Oh, ye gods, I'm not insulting you; on the contrary, I'm all for you! Look here, dearie, between you and me we'll be straight, agreed? I've been studying which one of you two girls would make the better wife for our Florian," Mousie announced merrily. "No doubt your sister is the kinder one, the better one by far, but a woman that's all goodness is a salad without dressing. She'd mother him and smother him, carry him his slippers and soothe his nerves and probably even cure him of his stage fright. But mind my word, Florian without stage fright would never be the success he is. It's his greatest stimulant and he needs a peaceful life and quiet nerves as I need a boil on my nose. The whip, the sting, the picador's spear in his side—that's what our Flori needs and that's what he would get from you. Prick him, needle him, excite him, drive him into a rage, hurt him, because he must learn about pains or his adagios will never amount to much! All you saints! If I were the sort of woman who could hurt him, what an artist I should have made of him! As it is I can do nothing but play my doodle doodle doodle and scream at him when he gets too pedantic and meticulous, the poor fool. Well, anyway——" Mousie said, pulling herself away from some dreamy speculation. "I've come to the conclusion that he would do better to marry you, in spite of all the trouble you're going to make for him. Also, a pretty wife is always an asset for a celebrity——"

Mercy me, thought Angelina, who with difficulty had followed Mousie's zigzagging ruminations, I believe that nasty poor old night owl is in love with Florian. "You talk as if Mr. Ambros would only have to choose between me and my sister," she said, trying to sound as arrogant as Florian did at times.

"Indeed, and that's precisely what he will have to do, even if he doesn't realize it. Apart from his music, Flori doesn't know more of himself than a potato in the ground."

"It appears the possibility never occurred to you that neither my sister nor myself might care to marry Mr. Ambros," Angelina said with pompous dignity. Mousie was greatly amused.

"But sure, you want to marry Florian, either of you, definitely," she answered merrily. Then, growing serious all of a sudden, she bent closer to Angelina and asked confidentially: "Do you know how much your father intends to give you girls for a dowry? He is a millionaire, isn't he? Don't you understand me? Your dot, you know—your marriage portion, to use an old-fashioned expression."

"I'm sorry, but I don't seem to understand you at all," Angelina said with cold dignity. "I don't think that my father intends to buy us husbands, if that's what you wish to convey to me. It isn't customary in the United States; not even in Brooklyn, I suppose."

"Oh dear, oh dear," sighed Mousie; "there you can see how long I've been away from home! Well, the tribal mores differ. In some places husbands have to be bought, in others daughters are sold to the richest customer; in the U.S.A. for instance. Nothing to be particularly proud of. Over here no man would dream of marriage with nothing but moonlight and stardust and young romance for a foundation. One thing is sure, Florian will have to put his hands on some money soon—or why, did you think, would the Generalin kowtow to you people? She's nobody's fool, the tough old girl, and for all her making fun of Florian she loves him more than all her other sons together. Believe you me, the Generalin will see to it that he gets the money he needs for the Empress."

For a second Angelina wondered if Mousie's mind were possibly slightly deranged; but there was nothing but a steady, bright, shrewd intelligence in her round eyes.

"You mean, he never told you about her? Never mind, he will, he will, because he thinks of her every spare minute."

It knocked the breath out of Angelina. "My God," she whispered, "you don't mean it! Florian—and the Empress?"

Mousie burst with laughter. "*Merde!* Now I've confused the issue. Listen here, my pet, the Empress is a violin, a Stradivari, one of the greatest violins in existence; she's called the Empress because she was given as a present to the Empress

Maria Teresia of Austria by the Count D'Artôt, who had inherited her from his father. But perhaps you don't know that every one of the really great violins has a name? Well, remind me to give you a book in which you can read up the whole history of the Empress; her story is quite as interesting and romantic as that of any other great beauty. Joszi owns her now and lets Flori play her every once in a while and that fool Flori has fallen in love with that fiddle, he's obsessed with the idea that his whole career depends on getting him and the Empress together; he's made up his mind that he'll be an absolute failure if he can't get the Empress."

"Why can't he? The Archduke is his friend, and if so much depends on it for Florian . . ."

"Sure. That's what we all thought. But suddenly this Mr. Gibbons pops up, rich as rich can be, and offers Joszi a fantastic price. Joszi, on his part, needs a lot of money just now to extricate himself from the loving claws of La Valérienne—you might have heard of her—and selling the Empress to Mr. Gibbons seems an easy way out. Naturally Flori is terribly disappointed in our generous Archduke. As a consolation Joszi got him another decoration. More honour, more spinach for Flori's overworked lapels, thank you ever so kindly. Well, that's how matters stand at present and now you know why Florian has to come into money before Mr. Gibbons buys the Empress. It makes things much simpler when you know exactly where you stand."

"You are awful," Angelina said, clenching her fists. "And whatever you say, I don't believe that Florian would sell himself, not even to get that fiddle."

"Of course not. He's such a lamb he would never understand such a complex deal. But one thing I know: whoever will give him that violin he will love and cherish to the end of his days. Ugh! I have spoken."

For almost a minute Angelina fell into a deep silence and meditation. "How much does that fiddle cost?" she asked soberly. ("You'd think my little Annie is just a butterfly," Mr. Ballard always used to say, "but you'd be surprised what a good head she has for figures——")

"The Archduke claims that Mr. Gibbons offered him twenty thousand dollars for her. I don't think it would break your father's neck to give you that much of a dowry, do you?"

Some of the shimmering lustre had been rubbed off the

golden image of Florian; yet at the same time Angelina felt that she held the trump card of the game. "Why doesn't Florian buy the violin himself? He makes heaps of money, after all——"

"Makes it and spends it. Building up a career like his doesn't come free of charge, girl. How the expenses pile up, agents, travels, hotels, the posters, the halls; the little attentions and receptions for the gentlemen of the press; impresarios, representation, publicity; the whole bloody circus! Why, this might surprise you, but he has to pay even me for my labour. And don't forget: there is that family of his, the good name, the goddamned honour of all those fine officers in their tight corsets and swell uniforms! Drinking, gambling, duelling, betting, losing; horses, women, keeping up with the swank of their cavalry regiments. All those pressing debts of honour. Who do you think is paying them? Sometimes, so help-me God, I feel like shooting every one of the bunch. There are times when they're eating poor Flori alive and you can't see the sky for locusts."

Angelina was swept along in Mousie's bitter outburst. "Well, I'll show them. I mean—I would show them where to get off," she said, sucking in her cheeks in a quiet rage.

Mousie eyed her thoughtfully. "Yes, I guess you would, at that. I guess you'd keep a big padlock on anything that's yours, house, man or money. Hush," she said, "there he is now. You do your stuff, dearie. *Servus*, Flori, you're late. I really thought you had flushed yourself down the inadequate toilet of the Maestro."

"Angelina darling——" he said, surprised. "What—why—how——"

"Oh, I brought your gloves, you forgot them——"

"You must be hungry, Flori. I'll see what Djuro can scare up for you in the kitchen," Mousie said, dissolving once more into a grey streak of ectoplasm, and disappeared. It was a bit too obvious, Ann thought.

"What did you say? Oh yes, my gloves. Thanks," Florian said, still somewhere far off with the Brahms concerto.

"Florian," Angelina said urgently. "I fibbed a little. There were no gloves but—but—I simply had to see you tonight. Only three more days and we'll be gone, Florian——"

"That's right. Are you looking forward to visiting Budapest?"

She was swallowing a few sharp-edged stones, and then she

made a brave try at corraling his attention. "We were just talking about that violin. About the Empress—you'd like to buy her, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, you know about that? But you can't possibly understand what it means to a violinist to get his hands on such an instrument—*Heilige Maria und Joseph*, I'd go insane if this Mr. Gibbons should get her—to him a Stradivari means nothing but a good investment, and music be hanged——"

"Listen, Florian: I will get you that violin. I've made up my mind and I will."

He came away from the dark window and cupped her head in his hands. "What a dear little fool you are, Angelina."

"You don't know me. I'm no fool. If I want something, I make up my mind to get it—and I get it. Always."

That seemed to amuse him. "Always? As simple as that, is it?"

"Why don't you take me seriously? Because I'm not as big and tall and old as my sister? Don't you like me?"

"What do you think, Angelina?"

"As much as I like you?"

"I do not know how much that is—and quit playing pizzicato on my—would heart strings be the correct word?"

"Your English is improving by leaps and bounds, Florian, but I still can't quite understand you—sometimes. You're so hard to see through."

"Am I? Sometimes I'm afraid I'm almost too transparent. Must everything be said? Can't you let some of the overtones just swing——" he stared in her face and he was not thinking of Brahms now. "What is it you want to hear from me in my excellent English? That you'll be beautiful a few years from now? Yes, dangerously so—and you know it. What are you doing here?" he asked, as if waking up only now. "Does Maud know about it? Are you well again? You shouldn't be running around in the evening, you ought to be in bed and have a good rest. Mousie!" he called. "*Wo steckt das verflixte Frauenzimmer?* Mousie!"

"Would Swiss cheese and a bottle of beer do?" Mousie asked, manifesting herself out of space.

"Anything will do," Florian shouted, and Mousie dissolved again. "Come, Angelina, I'll take you to a cab. You look dead tired. I don't want you to faint in my arms once more."

"I'm sorry. Did it bother you?" She stood close to him, waiting.

"Yes, damn you, it did bother me—and now let's go. Mousie! Get ready for work, I'll be back in a minute."

The light of a greatly swollen toothache moon was soaking the confusing courtyards of the Friehaus, but Florian made no use of it.

"In three days we'll have a full moon," Angelina suggested.

"Will we?" he said absentmindedly.

"Yes, and by then I'll be on my way to Budapest," she said, but Florian had irrevocably retired into his own thoughts. He woke up a sleepy cab-driver who woke up his sleepy nag and Angelina was put into the hack without further ceremony. By the time her family returned from the opera she had been in bed almost two hours.

"She's fast asleep," Maud whispered to Mrs. Ballard, who considerably tiptoed away.

But Angelina was not asleep. She was marching up battle columns of figures for the swift acquisition of the Empress. Grandfather's trust fund—ten thousand dollars—but it takes too long until I'm of age—give it in collateral—borrow money on it—talk to Father—the pearls Grandma Ballard gave me—if I could sell them—I'd say I lost them—and get the five thousand dollars insurance money on top—I could say they were stolen in the hotel—I bet that chambermaid stole my stockings too, she has shifty eyes—Maud's pin money—my savings account—not enough—but for a down payment—I must talk to the Archduke—tomorrow—at the ball—he's a devil with the women—if I play my cards right—Florian—And with that Angelina fell asleep, a blissful smile on her face of a bland Raphaelite angel.

Saturday morning Angelina felt a little feverish, but if she was running a temperature she didn't want to know it. She didn't want to act fussy and old-maidish like Maud, who had acquired the habit of furtively sticking a thermometer into her mouth, taking a reading, and then quietly putting it back into its case. It was a leftover from last winter's influenza, as was her soft, suppressed, and irritating little cough.

"How much, Maud? Are you, too, feeling hot and cold?"

"I guess we're both a little excited—38.2—well, with these silly European thermometers you never know what's what."

At nine o'clock that morning Mr. Fessel, Court Coiffeur by Appointment to His Majesty, had appeared in person, because on this day he had to pile artful coiffures upon hundreds of heads, and the warm smell of alcohol burners, of singed paper

and hot curling iron was pervading their suite. There was a run on the enormous, old-fashioned bathtubs, but as more hotel guests than usual were taking baths that day, there soon ensued a scarcity of hot water and rumour had it that one of the water heaters on the second floor had run dry and exploded. The new corsets were tried on and mother and daughters were lacing each other in turn down to the waistline demanded by their new gowns. Then the corsets were taken off again to give room for a little meal; and at two o'clock Mr. Ballard rumbled in and told his women to take it easy, for land's sake, to take a little nap and a rest and not to wear themselves to a frazzle. Maud obeyed, but Angelina was unable to keep her eyes closed. She had to sit before the mirror and experiment with perfumes and powders and even with a sinful little box of rouge which she had secretly acquired with the help of the shifty-eyed chambermaid. There were ribbons to be put into her lingerie, her nails to be groomed and buffed to a high shine—and on second thoughts she attended to her toenails also, as carefully as if they were to be seen in public. With a sensation of *adventure and sin* she dusted her shoulders and young bosom with powder and dabbed her earlobes with eau de cologne. Then it occurred to her that Florian—or even the Archduke—might bend down over her hair while they were dancing and some of the eau de cologne went into her coiffure too.

At five o'clock it began to rain, at six o'clock Angelina had herself laced in once more, and by seven o'clock, much too early, she was fully dressed. That gave her another hour to practise moving her fan, handling her train, walking in her high-heeled slippers two sizes too small, rustling her petticoats. Tonight, tonight, tonight. Tonight everything had to happen, because tomorrow it would be too late. Suddenly her heart was pounding wildly against the tight stays as she recalled the ugly name which one of the young San Francisco journalists she knew used for such pressure of time. It's my deadline, she told herself and she could feel her will hard as a diamond inside her soft little self.

That night, Angelina thought often in later years, had been the turning point in her life. If that night had begun and ended differently, perhaps she would have grown into a different person altogether, and many bad things that had happened to her and to others would never have occurred. Because that night the roof was blown off her life and ever after she had

lived in a fatherless world where you couldn't trust anyone and if you didn't stand up for yourself you were lost. . . .

Shortly after seven o'clock the room she shared with Maud became too small for the two of them and she went into the salon separating their room from the parents' quarters; there was a tall mirror between the windows, and for a few minutes she stood arrested, caught in the old game: Mirror, mirror on the wall, who in this land is the fairest of all? . . .

Filled to the brim with delight about herself, so new, so different, so finely sculptured into her dark princess gown, she still felt hungry. It was not a hunger of the stomach but the familiar craving for attention and appreciation. Even as a two-year-old baby with the first pink ribbon in her hair she had needed compliments; then and ever since, this need had been satisfied by her father. [To her, as to millions of American daughters, her father was unique and incomparable; a rock, a great warmth, a deep security, her best, most lenient, most understanding, most adoring friend; also a bit of a dummy on whom to study and try out her little wiles, but basically: a man.]

A spacious foyer dimly lit by two softly hissing gas jets separated the salon from the parents' bedroom. On the wall wardrobe her father's opera cloak was hanging, ready to go to the ball. Angelina was just about to knock at her parents' door when some queer sounds in there made her stop and listen. In such matters as eavesdropping or reading other people's mail Angelina acted with the innocence of a savage; it was natural to do it and she was convinced that, given the chance, everybody did. But as she stood there listening, carefully avoiding the one squeaking board in the floor, she heard something she had never heard before. In there, Mrs. Ballard was weeping.

Weeping, crying, clumsily sobbing, blowing her nose; then a plaintive monotone, and more sobbing. And tonight of all nights, Angelina thought, putting her eye to the keyhole; but she couldn't see a thing although she heard a lot.

"It's a crying shame," sobbed Mrs. Ballard, muffled by tears and a handkerchief, "a crying shame and a disgrace it is, Charles Ballard, for a man of your age and standing to associate with a—all right, I'm too much of a lady to call her the name she deserves. A cheap piece of flesh that has gone through so many hands I wouldn't touch it if I found it on my butcher's counter. Did you forget, Charles Ballard, that

you are all of forty-six? Why, that little chit could well be your daughter! A tightrope walker, that's what it has come to! Buying champagne for a tightrope walker from the Ronacher Varieté, that's the last straw! That's more than I will stand for! Anything—anything—but not a tightrope walker——”

“Goddamn it, do we have to go through all this again? I can't help it. I'm a man, Marge, and nature will out,” Mr. Ballard said and he did not sound crushed but rather exasperated. “If I don't find my little bit of fun at home I have to get it where it's gladly offered, and for Christ's sake don't make a tragedy of it. Maybe I had a drink or two too many with Coby Frankel and the other boys, but it's not a crime to take a girl out and buy her a dinner. One thing you may be sure, she appreciated me and the champagne a lot more than you ever did. I don't see what you've got to complain about! I'm doing the best I can, I'm a good provider and a family man, you know I'm crazy about our girls and—now stop bawling, Marge, and get into harness. I told you a thousand times that I don't take anything away from you when I go after my own little pleasure once in a while. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but we didn't have much fun that way, you and me, and there has been a crack in it ever since that goddamned bungled-up wedding night of ours——”

“Charles Ballard, that beats everything you ever did to me! I wasn't born yesterday and I know only too well that men are wicked by nature; I've stood it as well as I could, I've borne up with it and given you children, Charles, I've coped with an impossible situation—good family man, are you? Running out to the ranch every second week-end, and living in sin with that filthy Mexican, that fat unkempt Gomez woman! And I've got to hush it up on account of your business and save your reputation for the sake of my girls. But now you've gone too far—three years of that filth, honestly, I don't understand what that dirty creature has got to have such a hold over you!”

“What she's got? She likes me, that's all. She makes me feel that I'm quite a fellow and that's what a man needs. If I found it at home, I wouldn't have to sneak off to the ranch, and if you think I like matters the way they are between us——”

“Hush—someone's coming——” said Mrs. Ballard, blowing a gallant fanfare into her handkerchief. Angelina backed hastily away from the door, which a second later was opened. There he stood, her father, tall and heavy, big muscle and respectable beard; her father of whom she had been proud all

her life, her own father, the dirty cheat. He was in his boiled shirt but without a collar, yet his neck was thick and he seemed to be in the process of buttoning his black silk braces to his black dress trousers. His shoulders were bulging under the thin batiste and he smelled of pomade and he stood there in the door with his sturdy legs apart and everything about it was shameless, shameless and dirty and wicked and he had betrayed her. Her own father had betrayed and cheated her and done unspeakable things with that Lupita, that unwashed wife of their drunken Mexican ranch foreman—and suddenly there rose in Angelina's throat all the bad words Miss Fishbein had pasted stamps over, they exploded inside of her, she hardly knew where they came from, all the low bad dirty words to name the low bad dirty things her own father had done with that stinking bitch, that filthy Mexican whore. She backed away from him until she was up against the wall. She believed she had been screaming, but she was frozen to solid ice and her lips were stiff, and instead of screaming and swearing she was still smiling; only she did not know of that sweet expectant smile that had grown onto her face and become part of it.

"Goodness, Annie, you certainly are a picture. Just take a look at our little Annie, Mama," Mr. Ballard said pleasantly. "I lay you ten to one she'll be the belle of the ball," he said in his usual affable tone, just as if the roof had not been blown off her life a minute ago. The gas jets turned blue, they were hissing louder, louder, now they were roaring, and then they grew dim, and Mr. Ballard came forward through the darkness to chuck his little girl under the chin.

She never knew how she reached the door to the corridor, backed out of it, and slammed it shut behind her; all she remembered was Mr. Ballard's face, stupid with incomprehension, his open mouth an astonished red hole in the centre of his conceited blond beard. At the World's Fair there had been baboons with just such beards and just such male vanity and just such dirty vices, and looking at their proudly exhibited pink and blue behinds had made Angelina sick. Just as sick she felt now as she stumbled towards the public bathroom. FUER DAMEN. LADIES. And right next to it: FUER HERREN. GENTS. A disgusting proximity of the sexes, even here; the shameless blue and pink behinds which the big baboons displayed in public were only thinly concealed by the dress shirts and tail coats and lying manners of civilization. There were no

gents, no gentlemen, if not even your own father was one. And if you couldn't trust your own father, whom in all the world could you ever trust? Somehow, hazily, Florian Ambros was mixed up in all her grief and sudden insecurity, for he, too, was a man. She was sick, desperate, shaken by a black rage, and there was no pup she could beat, no sister she could hate for it, no Beatrice to give her solace, there was nothing but this bottomless void where her father had been before.

Not for a moment did Angelina think of her mother; it did not occur to her to feel sorry for Mrs. Ballard or to respect her for the way she was covering up her husband's double life and keeping a respectable front for the world to see and a peaceful home for her daughters. To Angelina's mind her father had betrayed not her mother but herself. Pale under her rouge, sickly balancing at the rim of a deep dark faint, with cold sweat running from her armpits and down her thin flanks, she stumbled on and down the stairs. The hotel was proud of its new elevator in the gilded cage, but Angelina had forgotten about it, she had even forgotten about the Jubilee Ball in this her first shattering collision with reality.

Just then Florian Ambros entered the hotel lounge and, throwing a glance at the clock above the desk, he noticed that he was a few minutes too early for the invitation to share a bottle of champagne with the Ballards before dinner. Crossing the lounge, he stopped here and there to exchange a little joke with one of the old waiters he had known for years, a greeting with the reception clerk, a word with some of his acquaintances at the small marble tables. He was smiling his public smile and he wore his tail coat with the ease of one to whom evening dress is part of his profession. Under the opera cloak lightly thrown over his shoulders some decorations en miniature were sparkling on his left lapel and a large order was suspended on a striped ribbon below his white necktie. As usual, he had forgotten his hat at home, and a few raindrops clung to his hair.

This was how Angelina saw him when she came to the end of her flight through a thousand hells. There he stood at the foot of the stairs, a heavenly apparition, one of those gorgeous archangels with kind faces and flaming swords. For once she did not plan what to do but let it simply happen. Rushing down the last wide step of the stairs as though a pack of wolves were yapping at her heels, she flung herself against him and into his arms; the shivering, cold, frozen aching in her

chest melted, there was a dam break, a flood, and wildly sobbing, she clung to Florian — right at the foot of the stairs and in full view of all the smart people who were filling the lounge at that hour. The tiny stars and orders on his lapel bit their sharp edges into her cheeks and even the tiny pain of it was gladness and relief.

"*Um Gotteswillen*, what's the matter, what happened, why are you crying? Come, come, pull yourself together, please, one doesn't cry in public. How is Maud?" Florian asked in great bewilderment. "How is Maud?" he asked, trying to unfasten the girl's grip, but she would not let go.

"I can't tell you, I can't talk about it. It's too horrid. Florian, I want to die——"

"Come, come, don't make a scene in front of the people. What is it? Won't your parents take you to the ball? Please, let's go upstairs and you tell me all about it," Florian said, but Angelina sobbed brokenly that she would never go back, never, never again; and when he tried to lead her towards the elevator every muscle in her small body stiffened as in a cramp. Florian could not regale the lobby with a wrestling match between him and a sobbing young girl, nor could he carry her upstairs by force. Desperately embarrassed, he searched for a quiet corner where he might bring the girl to reason. But on this festive night of the ball there were no quiet corners in the crowded, buzzing hotel. For once Florian acted with decision. "Come, little angel, we're going for a ride," he said, piloting her across the lounge, through the big glass door, and past the giant coloured doorman in his ludicrous Turkish pantaloons. "Fiaker——" he said, raising two fingers.

"At your service, Your Grace—at once, Herr Baron—where to, Your Excellency?" Flurry of voices, drizzling rain, a few steps under a huge umbrella, and she was gently lifted into a coach.

"Let's just go along the Ringstrasse," Florian ordered vaguely; it caused the coachman to lower with pointed discretion the blinds at the little windows and close the door with an appreciative man-to-man smile. Rides of this sort were known in Vienna as Porcelain Fares, a name indicating their fragile nature and the careful handling they demanded. The full sympathies of Vienna's sentimental coachmen were with such passengers without definite destination, because, obviously, they were taking the coach with the sole intention of making love, which was nice in itself, and, besides, they were

charged double the tariff. Even the horses seemed trained for the exigency; slowly, at a soft-footed walk, they took off under the dripping chestnut trees of the boulevard.

Dark, close, safe. Nestled warm in Florian's opera cloak, secure and sheltered, with the rain on the carriage roof; a deep togetherness as Angelina had not known existed.

Everything was good now, inferno had turned into paradise. She was bedded against Florian's decorated chest, into the rhythm of his breathing and with the muffled steady beat of his heart against her ear. He had protectingly put his arm around her shoulder, holding her tightly to himself and caressing her face with his searching, consoling, sensitive fingers. For a while Angelina kept on sobbing for the sheer ecstatic pleasure of it. When he thought that she had cried herself empty he relaxed his hold and lit himself a cigarette and only his hasty inhaling the smoke and letting it stream out through flared nostrils betrayed that he was nervous.

"Now you must be reasonable and tell me what happened," he said, a bit too reasonable himself. "And stop crying or you'll ruin your pretty little face for the ball." Angelina muttered through clenched teeth that she wasn't going to the ball, it would kill her and she would rather be dead than join her family ever again—

"Did you have a fight with Maud?" he asked, faintly troubled, faintly amused. "Did Maud say anything that—well—that may have hurt you a bit?"

"Maud? Heavens no! We never fight, we love each other dearly, and Maud is such a darling, so sweet, she wouldn't hurt a fly. No—it is my—" but she baulked at the word "Father" and she sounded almost like her mother when she ended, lamely formal: "It is Mr. Ballard who hurt me and I never want to see him again."

At first she protested fervently that she would rather die than tell what her father had done to her, but after a while the whole of Mr. Ballard's crime and shame and outrage was spread out before Florian, and if he suppressed a smile of masculine understanding and solidarity, he did not let Angelina catch him at it.

"Look here, little angel, you can't understand those things, not yet, you are so gloriously young and innocent; but you must believe me one thing: your father has a right to live his own life, just as you will want some day to live your life in your own way. And you mustn't take too seriously such little

peccadilloes—so *kleine Seitenspruenge*——” he said in his nonchalant language. “When you understand your father better, you may even be a little sorry for him. And for your mother too. Life is a lonely affair, Angelina, and perhaps married people are the loneliest of them all, because they believed that marriage would be a way out of their loneliness. But most of the time it isn’t. Well—and sometimes it is.”

“Go on, go on talking, Florian darling—and hold me, hold me tight, please—I feel so lost——”

With a slightly impatient gesture Florian pulled up the indiscreetly discreet blinds, opened the window, flung out his cigarette, and retrieving his other hand and arm, he released Angelina. “Tell me—when I caught you at the hotel—where did you want to run?”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t think, I didn’t know what I was doing.” She raised her face and stared into his eyes. It was dark in the Fiaker, but at intervals a street lamp was gliding by and Florian’s face became a pale blur, his white shirt, waist, cuffs sharply cut out of the blackness. “I wanted to run to you. To whom else, Florian?”

He lit his second cigarette and then he took her hand in his again and went on talking, but only fragments of what he said reached her through the soft warm dreaminess of being alone with him and close. “. . . of course, you’ll go back to the hotel, and you will amuse yourself royally at the ball, I promise. I want to be proud of you, Angelina, and I expect countenance from you. ‘*Haltung*, Cadet Ambros, *Haltung*——’ that’s what my father used to command, and that’s the only good thing I learned from him. Do you think I never played at a concert with a toothache? Oh, my God, I played Mozart, the A Major Concerto, the evening after my best friend had shot himself, and, I assure you, I played well. And I played well the day my first great love went and got herself married to the assistant manager of a brewery; I was not quite eighteen then—almost as young as you are—and I felt that never, never, would there be a full moon after that.”

Instantly Angelina felt jealous of that first great love, but she was careful not to show it.

“Come to think of it—there never was——” he said a little later, deep in thought.

“There never was what, Florian?”

“A full moon.”

Angelina held her breath. "There was one, Florian," she said softly, "the last time you told me good night——" Street lamp and dark. Street lamp and dark. Street lamp and dark.

"Yes, I dare say there was," he said at last. "But I'm afraid I didn't notice it." Street lamp and dark. Street lamp——

"Help me—please, help me—don't leave me alone," she whispered.

"You are not alone. I am with you. Poor little, little Angelina," he said, and his voice had gone tight and husky.

Perhaps that was the only moment in her life when she loved anyone else but herself and without reservations. There were no detours, no tricks, no scheming, no insincerity. She gave a deep sigh, like a sleeping child, and clasped her hands around Florian's neck; he bent down over her face and kissed her, or perhaps she kissed him, it did not matter. When she opened her eyes she saw the trees with wet shining leaves glide by lazily past the slow carriage and, very distinctly, she saw the pattern of raindrops on the window and she heard Florian whisper: "Damn you, oh, damn you . . ." His hold grew stronger and tighter, he kissed her again. "You hurt me," she whispered, "let go, you hurt me," as she felt his teeth pressing hard into her lips and forcing them open and she heard him whisper something in German, a caress or, perhaps, a curse; and all was so completely different from Johnny O'Shaughnessy, or from Mr. Hopper on the upper deck, and now it was all decided and Florian belonged to her. White Alençon lace, the Eiffel Tower, the wedding, the whispering crowd, maybe the Archduke would be their best man, and a ferris wheel turning, turning. His mouth was still upon hers and then he let go of her and she gained firm ground again.

"Florian, Florian dear, what shall we do now?"

He had moved over into his corner and lit another cigarette. "Now we shall behave and go back to the hotel, allegro molto. We have been in this Fiaker too scandalously long as it is."

From a journey to unknown continents Angelina returned into herself, and only now did she remember that riding with a gentleman in a closed carriage and without a chaperone was the most compromising step a young girl might take. If such adventure did not end in marriage, the girl was irrevocably ruined. Ann bit her lips, there was a new taste, a drop of blood. Kisses, yes, but we haven't been riding in this Fiaker long enough to cause a real scandal, and I'm not ruined, she

thought. Engaged? Well, let's hope so—if he is a gentleman, we are no doubt engaged to be married by now, unofficially, that is. He'll have to speak with Father though——

Funny how little she suddenly cared about Father's—what had Florian called them?—peccadilloes. *Kleine Seitenspruenge*. But in any case—if I am to be compromised, I'd better make a sure job of it, she decided. Her mind was moving once more in its finely designed little spirals. "Please, oh, please, Florian darling—I can't face them, not yet—I'm too upset. Feel how I tremble—give me a little time——"

"Well—we all are cowards one way or another; I have my bouts with stage fright and you——" He left something unsaid and then he opened the window and told the coachman to complete the circle of the Ring before taking them back to the Bristol. "I'm sorry, Angelina, I lost my head. Forgive and forget——" he said, and for the rest of the ride he kept smoking in silence while Angelina got herself ready to face Mr. Ballard, and she also began designing their engraved wedding announcement. It would probably have to be done in two languages and that would add an extra touch of smartness. Or perhaps in French, which everybody understood—everybody, that is, but herself and a great part of San Francisco's top-drawer society——

By the time they arrived at the hotel these speculations had almost blotted out the terrible crisis she had undergone and had calmed the turmoil into which Florian's kiss had thrown her. Just as he was paying the coachman, another idea came to her mind, something that put an entirely different aspect on her father's sinfulness. Certainly, after what she knew of him, he could not expect further respect and affection from her as his due; if he wanted to win it back he would have to make some extra effort; suddenly she understood why guilty husbands lavished jewellery on their wives, acquiescent tolerance could be profitable, and forgiveness had to be bought. She smiled brightly at Florian, who had taken her elbow to lead her through the lounge. "You mustn't be afraid, Angelina. I'll talk to your father and explain everything—and may I ask what you are grinning at like the Cheshire cat?"

"Remember I promised to get that violin for you? I think I shall get it tonight. If you can arrange for me to dance with the Archduke I am sure I shall get it—at a fair price," she said.

"Of course, you little monkey," said Florian. "The prince

always pays with his most precious treasures for a dance with the loveliest maiden. But only in fairy tales, little monkey, only in fairy tales."

They found Maud patrolling the corridor in front of their suite, her hands cold and damp, her face hot and flushed. With a husky, excited whisper she pounced upon Angelina. "For heaven's sake, Ann, where have you been? You must be crazy to disappear like this—tonight—and in your new gown—without a shawl and wrap! I covered up for you as well as I could—really, I haven't told so many lies in a year as in that last half hour, just to keep Mother out of our room. What a story I made up—told her you had a splitting headache and you had taken a powder and you were asleep, and she mustn't disturb you, and I locked the door, and I had you paged in every corner of the hotel—well, where have you been? Florian—where did you find her? Really, Ann, sometimes you still behave like a very naughty brat! I wouldn't have gone to all that trouble if it weren't for Mother's sake; you know how much this ball means to her—but you don't seem to care if you spoil it for her and for all of us——"

"Oh, quit fussing, Maud," Angelina said; really, no one could irritate her so much as her sister with her silly ways and her broad hips and her soft big cow eyes and her goodness. "If it comes to spoiling the evening for Mother, there are certain other members of our family who've done plenty of that. And what about *my* evening? Who cares if *my* evening is spoiled? If you knew what I have been through tonight you'd be ashamed to make me responsible for anything."

Maud looked from her to Florian, suddenly very quiet "Florian? What happened? You're late—why do you look so funny, both of you? You didn't—or did you tell her?"

"I'll explain it all to you, Maud. Angelina was upset about something, very upset, but now she is all right again; I—I was a trifle upset myself. I'll explain everything to you."

"And how d'you look, Annie! Your hair—it's all mussed up, go get yourself straightened out. And your eyes—you didn't cry, did you?" She put her arm around Angelina's shoulders as though she were still the little sister to be scolded, consoled, and protected. "Did you cry, poor little Sis? Wait, I'll make little camomile pads for your eyes and you lie down for a few minutes, not long though, they're all waiting

for you with the dinner. The whole bunch is in there, all the Frankels, and your mother just arrived, Florian. Lord, what complications—and it had to be just tonight!”

“I don’t care how I look and who’s in there,” Angelina said, defiantly opening the door to the foyer through which hardly an hour ago she had escaped in complete despondency. A waiter was just leaving the salon, carrying out a pail with melted ice and empty champagne bottles, and there came a burst of laughter through the half-open door, a vision of merry faces and hands holding glasses in the smoke-blue air, and a glimpse of Mr. Ballard firmly planted in the centre of the room with his legs apart and in fine harmony with himself; then the door closed over this typical let’s-have-a-drink-before-dinner merriment. Mr. Frankel, who prided himself on being something of a mimic and a wit, seemed to be telling a joke, and there followed another explosion of laughter. The same moment Angelina became aware of herself in the narrow mirror of the hall wardrobe the forbidden rouge all gone from her cheeks, hairpins dropping like dry pine needles from her ruined coiffure, and on her lips the imprint of Florian’s kiss: an almost black drop of dried blood.

“Tell them my head is better and I’ll be ready in three minutes,” she whispered, hastily backing into their bedroom and pushing Maud towards the noisy salon. “And—Maud—thanks for covering up for me. Flori will tell you everything.”

It was quite a splendid dinner in the splendid dining-room of the splendid hotel where the American millionaires were served up to the other guests like a very special dish. Waiting for Angelina had made them thirsty and the before-dinner champagne had made them gay, and their table was the loudest one—or rather the only loud one—in that hushed grotto of thick red carpets and draperies and pink-shaded lamps. With Florian sitting between her and her sister, Angelina felt like an actress holding the centre of the stage and the full attention of her audience at a gala performance. When the dessert was served on its bed of spun sugar and the maitre lit the Armagnac he had personally poured over it, Mr. Ballard got up, ready to make one of his urbane and much-demanded after-dinner speeches. “Hear ye, hear ye,” Mr. Frankel shouted wittily, “silence for the Vice-President of the Society for Just Distribution of Pug Dogs to Under privileged Spinsters!”

“Why, you are a card, Coby, isn’t he a card, Mrs. Ballard?”

screamed Mrs. Frankel; but Mrs. Ballard was demurely smiling into her lap and Mr. Ballard suddenly looked dignified and quite serious. Silence sprouted around the table and the waiters stood back, expectantly. Even more than before, the attention of the other tables was turned towards this one with its flowers and the American ladies in their spectacular ball gowns, and the flaming dish placed in the centre and small blue flickers licking from the plates into the upraised faces.

"Friends—and you, my dear Generalin, who have become much more than a friend to all of us—this is in a way a farewell party, because tomorrow we must say good-bye to Vienna. But at the same time it is the happiest hour, not only of the happy weeks we have spent here, but one of the happiest hours we ever enjoyed. I am saying this not only for myself but also for the lovely lady at my side who I have the great good luck to call my wife. I could not wish for a better occasion to make an announcement that might not come as a great surprise to some of you, although I must say that the two young people whom it concerns have kept their secret quite well and for a long time. I am afraid we have subjected their love to a severe test, but their patience and fortitude have won us over. I am only a simple businessman but in my ignorant way I love music and I can't blame my girl for falling in love with a musician whom the whole world knows and admires and whom Mrs. Ballard and I have come to love and trust like a son. Flori—and you, Maud—I drink to you and I wish and hope that you will never be less happy than you are tonight."

Flori and Maud. Flori and Maud. Flori and Maud. Trumpets and fanfares. Cheers and kisses. Champagne in each glass, little flames on each plate, a glowing smile on every face. And a hammer crashing down on Angelina's heart and breaking it in pieces. She could feel it break, she could almost hear the wrenching noise of it, a bitter taste in her mouth, poison, gall and vinegar. And the Frankels, by special invitation, witnesses of her crucifixion. All of San Francisco was present, in the shape of these five loudmouthed people, to watch her steep fall. There she sat in her glorious gown, with the mark of Florian's kiss still dark on her lower lip, and she raised her glass and drank and cheered and smiled.

She had a remarkable ability, had Angelina. She could fall sick or drop in a faint whenever it seemed expedient; but she

could also keep herself from fainting when there was every reason to faint. The pain in her heart and all through her chest and up her shoulder and down her left arm was so fierce and real that she knew she could have died right then and there; an octopus crushing her heart between his tentacles. Her breath stopped and she knew that just one more second without breathing, just a few more heartbeats missed, and she would be dead.

Yes, she could easily have died and spoiled that lovely hour for Florian and Maud; but instead she got up and embraced and kissed her sister and she looked straight into Florian's eyes and smiled as she said: "I wish you all the luck you deserve."

No, she neither fainted nor died nor gave herself away the night her sister's engagement was announced, and of that she would always remain proud. She went to the ball and she had not only one dance with the Archduke Joseph Albert but three; it made quite a splash in the papers and all of Vienna talked about it the next day. Maud's engagement wasn't even mentioned.

It took Ann three days to make up her mind and then she wrote a letter to Clyde Hopper, Esq.

Dear Mr. Hopper,

I wonder if you still remember the girl whose photo I am enclosing? Yes—it is I . . .

Maud Ambros looked appraisingly at the portrait of the late Mrs. Ballard which, after various migrations, had landed above the mantelpiece of the upstairs sitting room. "Don't you think that's the best place for it, Sis? From here she can look out over the bay like she used to."

Angelina made a small gesture of approval. She had wrapped around her shoulders the cashmere shawl Grandma Ballard had left her and pulled her chair close to the ember-glow of the grate, but she felt cold all the same. "It's chilly, isn't it?" she said with a little shudder. "I had almost forgotten how cold San Francisco can be. Just feel my hands—I swear they haven't been warm since I left the Islands."

"Poor little Sis! They say the blood gets thinner in the tropics." Maud's attention was still on her mother's portrait: violet satin, silver grapes, long train, deep décolletage, large ostrich fan. "Wasn't it a horrid fashion? Do you remember that dress, Ann?"

"Dimly——" Mrs. Hopper answered. As if she could ever forget the bitterness of that evening in Vienna, the accumulated bitterness of the eight years since. Maud was still fussing over the equally fussy portrait. She fetched one of the hyacinth glasses from the bay window and placed it on the mantelpiece. "Poor mother! What a disappointment when Mr. Meryl wouldn't paint all her twenty-two grape bunches into that portrait!"

"Her generation hadn't much taste," Angelina said leniently.

"Poor darling—and she tried so hard."

"A bit too hard, if you ask me."

"Not for herself, though. She only wanted to make real ladies of us two brats and see us married off to real gentlemen—the dear, unselfish soul."

Angelina was growing very tired of the post-mortem. She grew tired quite easily; probably her heart had never quite recovered, it seemed like a heart with a leak, strength dribbling from it until she felt on the brink of dying with the unsupportable emptiness in there. In Hawaii, on Leihana Plantation, she had often been gripped by a panicky premonition that they might find her on the floor, dead, alone, no one to help her, the small town of Hilo hours away——

"Go on, dear," Maud was saying, "you were telling me about your place on the island——"

"A dream of a place! I wish you could have managed to come for a visit, you and Flori, you would have loved Plantation House. Almost like one of those large old country seats in England, only more exotic, such beautiful grounds, stables, a tennis court, and, naturally, we had our own beach——"

. . . so large, so vast, so frightening the house, the rooms so high, the walls so empty, tinged with green by the moving shadows of giant tropical plants. Indoors a depressing sunless dusk, anxiously preserved; outdoors either stabbing daggers of light or grey stampede of clouds exploding in torrents with an uproar like a brigade of mad drum majors romping on the corrugated roof. Everywhere the loathsome monotony of the cane fields, an ocean of boredom whose waves at sunrise would swallow Hopper on his giant horse, to spit him out at sundown, a tired, thirsty, dirty man; a crust of the all-penetrating harvest dust on his sweaty shirt, his face, his hair; a smell of sweat and horse, the acrid odours of burned-off dry stalks, the sweetish, brownish stench of molasses carried from

the mill into the connubial bedroom. Mosquitoes, flies, lizards. A boundless ever-sameness, broken only by catastrophes, a tidal wave, an eruption of Mauna Loa, a fire in the mill, just when Hopper was off on one of his frequent inspection trips to another island.

On his return he would find her crying, sobbing, choking with that incessant fear of being left alone. "I say, Old Girl, you oughtn't to carry on so. If you feel lonesome, why don't you have your horse saddled and visit the neighbours? Or have The Chaps up for dinner? Alone? With sixteen servants waiting on you hand and foot! Come, come now—don't you know that you're the queen on this plantation?"

"... sixteen servants for the house and I don't know how many for the grounds and the horses," Angelina impressed upon Maud, who listened with pleased respect. "Of course, we entertained a lot; you know, the chief manager is something like a king on his plantation and has to represent in style——"

Those sixteen servants had sometimes frightened her out of her wits, and the rumours Beatrice was for ever dragging from the cooking house on to the veranda only made it worse. A menacing bunch of Japanese, Chinese, natives, soundless on bare feet, sneaking, thieving, obsequious to your face, hostile and dangerous when you turned your back. As for the neighbours, the next ones were thirty miles away, an oldish Bible-reading missionary couple who had arrived in the steerage of a Danish ship some twenty years ago and still looked and acted it. And The Chaps, Hopper's assistants, were a rowdy, uncouth, beer-gulping lot. One evening in their company was enough to put Angelina to bed with a three days' spell of fever and insupportable homesickness. She was yearning for the fog of the bay, the bracing winds of San Francisco, for the Ballard home on Clay Street, and the clear tears were streaming down her face, Beatrice padded in with offerings of cooling juices, papaya, pineapple, coconut milk, mango—all of it alien, too sweet, too perfumed, and altogether detestable. "I can't stand it, I can't stand this sort of life any longer, Beatrice. I'm going to die here, I want to go back where I belong——" she would sob. Beatrice, too, hated Leihana. "You go tella Mistah Hopper isa *crudete* he keepa my bambina disa wild country. If you don'ta tell him Beatrice go tell him."

"Never mind, Bea, I've told him and plenty, but he won't

listen." It had become her good morning and good night to her husband: "I can't stand it here, I can't bear up with it much longer take me back to the mainland, Hoppy, please, take me where I belong, before I am too weak to travel——"

"Look here, Old Girl, you've married a planter, it's the only kind of life I'm made for, and Leihana is doing splendidly, really, I wouldn't know a nicer spot on earth, everybody is happy in the Islands, why can't you try and love it a little, for my sake—and you will have good company as soon as little Hopper arrives——"

Angelina spread her cold hands over the embers; it seemed desperately necessary to let Maud know by implication that all the brilliant pleasures of Rome and Paris and cosmopolitan society and being the wife of a famous virtuoso were pale and trivial compared with the tropical splendour of her own past eight years. "Life in the Islands, Maud——" she rushed on, "if you haven't lived there, you can't imagine how rich it is. It's all so—so generous and gay—just one long round of feasts and parties——"

In the third year there was a bit of trouble on the plantation. A new pest, a borer, was making inroads in the cane and in Hopper's share of the profits. Worried and gloomy in daytime, he was spending more and more nights in noisy sessions with The Chaps. "Let's leave Leihana, let's go back to the Mainland, you're ruining yourself and me too, and for what?" Angelina would drill and bore into him, but now Hopper was a man at war and would not retreat. After five years there was another bit of trouble, with the field hands this time—Angelina called them coolies—a little rioting in the teeming, buzzing row of company shacks, a hidden restlessness in the house. In a panic Angelina sent to the mill for Hopper; when he arrived in a cold sweat, she was stretched out on her bed, pitifully small, limp with fear, but trying to be game. "My heart—it almost gave out—and Beatrice says 'Takato wanted to kill Ah Wong in the kitchen and I'm so alone, I'm always alone——'"

"Look here, my little grasshopper, you're not alone, I'm here with you, any time you need me—or don't I count at all?"

But he was not there when she gave birth, five weeks too soon, to a terribly small, terribly ugly little girl who took forty-eight hours of labour and all of the skill of the Chinese plantation doctor for her arrival and looked like a mummy

thousands of years old. Neither was he there when a diphtheria epidemic spread from Leihana village to Plantation House and struck the gardener Takato's little twin dolls, and her own baby. Returning hastily from the island of Maui, Hopper had cried over the tiny casket as no six-foot-two man ought to cry, and afterwards he got wildly and unrestrainedly drunk in the company of The Chaps. But Hopper—that was a chapter all by itself. . . .

"... when I lost my little girl, it changed everything for me. And then my accident on top of it—but we won't talk about that——" Angelina said so quietly, with such a strained, pathetic little smile, that this time it was Maud who had tears in her eyes. Quickly she put her large hand on Angelina's shoulder as if to protect and steady her younger sister. "I know, Sis, I know. But let a little time pass and you'll have another baby."

When Angelina had felt that she could not stand the hardships of exile and Leihana prison another day, she had resorted to furious and foolish action. Something has to give or to break! she had thought, forcing her untrained young horse Puolani over a five-foot fence. She might have broken her neck—and it would serve Hopper right!—but she came off with some cracked ribs and various smaller injuries. Her accident bore results; at last Hopper was shocked into taking her to the Mainland—only temporarily as he tried to reassure himself—only while he was supervising the construction of his company's new sugar refinery. But Angelina had different ideas.

"Do you really want to settle in San Francisco? If you like Leihana so much—won't you miss it?" Maud was asking her.

"I certainly will—but I'm afraid that's over for me," she answered sadly.

"But Clyde? I don't think he's very happy in San Francisco, do you? He is not cut out for stuffy office work; he seems—well—a bit restless."

"He was just as restless on the plantation. He'll get used to San Francisco—he'll have to. You see, it's a pity, but Dr. Bryant says I must never return to the tropics. I'm not strong enough, the climate would absolutely ruin me in the long run——"

Maud looked at her reflectively. "What's the matter with us, Sis? When I was expecting little Joy the doctors told me travelling was bad for me and I'd have to stay put. It's true,

I wasn't very useful to Flori on his concert tours. It's hot in Rome and freezing in Stockholm, and the cold you catch in Hamburg you carry with you all the way to Rio—thank heavens, Flori didn't mind making his headquarters in San Francisco; in fact I think he likes it here."

"He does, does he? But the city isn't what it used to be—goodness, I sound like all the old people: 'You ought to have seen San Francisco in the seventies,' that's what Father always tells you, and Grandma Ballard before him: 'You ought to have seen San Francisco in the fifties'—but it's true, not even this house is the same since you took over," Ann said, rounding up the changes in one glance. The gas chandelier was wired for electricity, the fake brocade had given way to flowered chintz, and there were no more portières between the rooms. "Now it seems always a bit draughty," Angelina said, shivering a little.

"It was necessary on account of the acoustics. Flori can't study in a padded cell."

"Wouldn't you think the acoustics are almost too much improved?" Angelina said with a little laugh. The house was resounding with the combined noises of Mr. Ballard's three hobbies which had come into bloom soon after Mrs. Ballard's demise. When he was not hammering away in the basement, where he produced chairs so misshapen that even the Salvation Army accepted them only reluctantly, he let the big-horned de luxe phonograph in his downstairs den blare forth to his heart's content. And simple-minded little intermezzi on the mouth organ were sandwiched in between, since Mr. Ballard had returned to this skill of his youth with a vengeance and proved himself quite a wizard on his lowly instrument.

"Don't you sometimes wish Father were a stamp collector?" Angelina said, faintly amused. "How in the world does Florian stand for this sort of music?"

"No trouble at all. Father's quiet as a mouse when Flori is at home; anyway, he is spending more and more time on the ranch."

"Another of his little hobbies that doesn't disturb you?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know. That Gomez woman. Is she still around?"

"Oh yes, since Gomez died, Lupe is the whole show; keeps the ranch going—and everything. She's a fine figure of a woman. I'm glad of it, Father would be rather lonesome without her."

"Well! I suppose men are like that," said Angelina with strained tolerance. After all, she was a married woman now, and married to Hopper at that——

Suddenly all noises stopped and Maud was listening to the front door. "I thought it was Flori," she said, smiling unconsciously, "but it's only Beatrice with the child." Angelina's heart had skipped a beat.

"I'm beginning to think you're married to Mr. Wells's Invisible Man. Where's Florian keeping himself all the time?"

"He had to go to that cocktail party the Bohemian Club is throwing for Jan Kubelik."

"And you're left to sit at home? Well, Maud, I declare——"

"I don't care too much for that sort of thing. And I didn't feel quite up to it today. . . ."

Uhu! Ann thought. Jan Kubelik was the new rage of San Francisco; his programmes were brilliant and his technique perfectly overwhelming. He was, moreover, married to a lady of noble birth, as the papers put it, a ravishing beauty who, gave sparkling well-publicized interviews. Poor Maud just doesn't dare compete with Mrs. Kubelik, Angelina thought, glancing with malicious pleasure at her sister, who was just switching on the lights; for the first time she noticed that Maud had changed. Probably it was part of the all-over changes the twentieth century had brought about. Cocktail parties, electric lights, automobiles, Nouveau Art; Ibsen, Oscar Wilde, Beardsley, Richard Strauss, George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*; ladies drank, ladies smoked, ladies might even be divorced and still be ladies. They fought for women's suffrage and against corsets—and Maud was looking taller, thinner, almost gaunt, and her high-coloured cheeks had hollow little shadows. It's the new line, Angelina thought; or else there is a worm in the apple and her marriage didn't turn out quite as wonderfully happy as she pretends——

"Will Clyde be home for dinner?" Maud was asking into her rambling thoughts.

"I—no—I don't think so." (And you don't need to let me feel that this is your household and that I'm only a guest; this is my old home as much as yours, she thought in a sudden flare of irritation.) "Johnny O'Shaughnessy wanted to show him some lots way out in the Western Addition, and afterwards they were going to a club or to do the town or something."

"Have you seen Johnny? You'll be surprised how he's come

up in the world," Maud said, smiling a little. Since Mr. Ballard had given young O'Shaughnessy a chance by making him a salesman on the staff of his real estate company, Johnny had obviously done very well for himself. His freckled Irish face, his honest blue eyes, his sturdy elbow and gift of gab were great assets. Ann had lunched with him but did not deem it necessary to inform her sister about it. "Father seems to think that young O'Shaughnessy is very promising political timber," she said elusively.

"Well, considering Father's opinion about the corruption in our city and county politics, that's a questionable compliment," Maud said, amused. "What's he trying to palm off on Clyde? Those sand lots out on Nineteenth Street?"

"I don't know. I believe some house we might lease for a year. It's time we got settled. In any case, if we don't find something this week, I have decided we'll move to a hotel. We don't want to crowd you folks here in ye olde homestead."

"Nonsense, Ann! You're not—and—and—I counted very much on your staying here, when——" Maud seemed flustered. "There's a certain reason why—I'll tell you—not now—later——" she said in growing confusion as there was a great tapping and giggling coming up the stairs.

Mousie materialized in the door. "Somebody wants to say good night to Mummie," she announced and little Joy, already in her doll's bathrobe, bounced into the room like a ball of terry cloth. Behind her Beatrice was spreading the bat wings of her indestructible black shawl. Little Joy was a lively, sturdy baby of almost three, her hair a riot of shiny fat ringlets, her fat cheeks spanked a deep shiny red by the wind, and in her fat little fist she held a crushed cluster of narcissus.

"Mummie, Mummie, you bring Mummie flowers!" she was shouting; she spoke quite well for her age, but the individual "I" had not yet separated itself from that fascinating outer world all about her and she kept stubbornly referring to herself as "You".

Maud was standing at the other end of the room, her back to the bay window, with all the hyacinths stiffly lined up behind her. "Thank you ever so much, my darling, such beautiful flowers! Will you put them on the table over there for me?"

"Da baby wanta kiss Mummie gooda night, no?" said Beatrice, shoving the child towards Maud, but Mousie reached out with an arm like a tenterhook and hauled the little girl

back to her side. Her glance met Maud's and Maud said quickly:

"I don't want her to come too close to me, Beatrice, I still have this nasty little cold. Look, darling, I blow you a kiss—it's flying across the room—there—now it's sitting down right on your mouth." Beatrice was watching the little ritual with her deep rumbling laugh; and in Mousie's eyes, whenever she regarded Florian's child, gleamed the combined ecstasies of an old-maid aunt and an infatuated grandmother. Angelina felt left out of it all; it was a sad, lonely feeling.

"Well, as I have no cold—maybe you'd let baby give me her good-night kiss?" she said with a tingling of impatience. Little Joy, released by Mousie and nudged on by Beatrice, advanced hesitantly towards her and she gathered the soft, warm bundle in her lap. It felt good to hold the child to herself; restful. She had never felt like this about her own baby that had been ugly and whimpering and without substance. If I had married Florian instead of Hopper, Joy would be my own child, thought something deeply buried in her.

"Here, listen to the ticktock, baby," she said, casting about for some inducement, and Joy accepted the little bribe; she put her ear to the tiny watch pinned to Ann's blouse, astonished delight spreading through her from head to toe.

"You like Angelina, little Gioia?" coaxed Beatrice.

"You like Annelina," Joy echoed magnanimously, putting her fat short arms round Angelina's neck as far as they would stretch. Maud stood in the bay window watching the little performance with an absent smile; the embers stirred lazily on the grate, the hyacinths exhaled their heavy sweetness; from Father's den came the strains of Carmen's "Habañera," and then the front door slammed.

"That's Flori," said Maud. Angelina was holding little Joy tightly embraced until he had entered the room: babies were so becoming.

"Back so early? That's a nice surprise," Maud said softly. Joy, quivering like a little fish, slipped away from Angelina and bounced herself into her father's arm.

"The trouble is I can stay a moment only—well, it's better than nothing, isn't it? Have to spend the evening with Jan and his wife and they want so much to meet you, Maud, I thought I might be able to change your mind? Well, darling, if you don't feel in the mood, I won't force it upon you, but ——— Mousie! Where's the little monster? Mousie! Please,

bring me the Empress, Jan is dying to try her out—stop tickling me, Joy, or I'll bite you, there, take her off my hands, Beatrice, yes, yes, I'll come to your bed and tuck you in——” and only after he had handed the laughing, squealing baby to the grinning Italian and kissed both Maud's hands, lingering over one after the other, did he seem to notice Angelina. “Good evening, Fairest of Them All,” he said lightly, vacillating between perturbed appreciation and amused irony as if she were still fifteen.

“Good evening, Mr. Ambros,” she replied with a taut effort at matching his banter. “I don't seem to remember quite where we met before?”

He had put his lips in Maud's parted hair for a second and was standing behind her, with his arm around her shoulder: as if they were posing for a bridegroom-and-bride photo. They were so utterly and boastfully and irrevocably married, those two, it was really a funny sight; heartbreakingly funny if all you could do was sit by and watch them and grin and spout benevolence and blessings. As if Maud hadn't stolen everything that should have by rights been mine: the man, the child, the whole glittering, glorious life of the famous—and then she complained about having to travel from Stockholm to Rio. If I were in her place, Ann thought ever so often, if I were in Maud's place, I should do this and that, I should dress so and so, and be a help to Florian's career, not a hindrance; if I were in Maud's place, by God, I'd not stay home tonight, I'd beat this Mrs. Kubelik at her own game, I'd make her look like an old dust rag, I'd wrap every critic around my little finger and run Mrs. Kubelik out of town——

“There is your violin,” Mousie said, returning from downstairs with the black case cradled in her arms. Florian took it from her and put it down on the small table, next to Joy's crushed, wilting flowers, and opened the case once more as if to make sure that the Empress was well dressed for the occasion. His hands changed their expression the moment he touched the instrument. Not when he touched Maud, not even when he touched his little girl, did his hands radiate such tender and impassioned life. Angelina could not turn her eyes away from those hands undressing the Empress. Three different squares of silk, a white one with his initials, a burgundy-coloured one, and a soft, flowered, antique brocade protected her precious body. Florian ran his thumb over the four strings, plunk plunk plunk plink, before he wrapped her up again and

bedded her on the moss-green velvet lining of the case. "You're a mean bastard, Flori," Mousie remarked as an aside. "All you want to do is put a tiny pinch of arsenic in Jan's soup, don't you? Showing off the Empress, just to watch him turn spinach-green with envy, give him sleepless nights, and make him doubt if his success here was worth while."

"What a mind reader you are," Florian laughed, "But it's true—I'm under the impression that Jan would like to fill me up with champagne tonight and then talk me into bartering the Empress against his Guarneri; perhaps he'd even throw his small Amati into the bargain. He must think me more stupid than I am, really. I love Jan and he's a nice fellow and a great violinist—but he ought to know that I'd give up both my eyes rather than part with my fiddle."

He smiled into Maud's eyes, sending her one of those secret messages that mean husband and wife, a life shared, a we-two-know-and-no-one-else. Mousie, with her special gift for mimicry, had become almost invisible, but Angelina heard her humming a flippant little melody. I wonder whom he really married—Maud or the Empress? Certainly he wouldn't have taken the one without the other, she thought. There was an echo somewhere: I will get you that violin—I always get what I want. Always? As simple as that?

No. Not always.

His hands closing the case. "Good night, dear heart. *Servus*, Mousie. *Ciao*, Beatrice," His hand touching hers. "*Auf Wiedersehen*, Angelina——"

Hopper had paws, not hands; Hopper had red hair sprouting on the back of each stubby finger. He was hairy all over, like an animal, and he used his paws like an animal would; grabbing, pinching, clumsily slapping the flesh of the female. Hopper was repulsive, he had been repulsive from the very moment she had become his wife——

The house door slammed, Florian was gone, Father began playing on his mouth organ again. "Shall we sit in front of the fire a little longer?" Maud said quietly. "There is something I'd like to discuss with you while Flori isn't around."

"It's about this cold of mine," she said as they were seated, "this chronic thing in my bronchis. It's been going on and on for too long a time. Remember, when I was a young girl, we always made jokes about my running a temperature? Well, it seems Dr. Bryant didn't quite like that and the last few weeks he gave me the run-around, specialists, examinations, X-rays,

everything. Yesterday he summoned me to his office and let me have my bitter medicine. It's not only my bronchitis; it has got into the tips of my lungs by now. That catarrh, I mean. Not as if I had tuberculosis, not at all! But Dr. Bryant warned me that it might turn into it if we don't arrest it at this stage. So there it is: a big strong horse like me and all rotten inside—"

Angelina's first reaction was a hot, angry refusal to accept this. Stealing my thunder—was it Shakespeare or was it? There had never been a question about Angelina being the delicate one, the frail little blossom to be nursed and watched with great care, while Maud was growing big and strong, healthy and uninteresting as a cabbage. To be sick was a distinction, and at times quite a useful one. That Maud, of all people, was suddenly claiming that distinction could not be tolerated. "I don't believe it," Angelina said agitatedly, "I don't believe a word of it and you shouldn't either. Dr. Bryant is an old quack. Remember the time he put me down with scarlet fever, when all I had was probably a touch of poison ivy——"

Maud smiled her calm smile. "It's all right, Sis, there's no need for cheering me up. I'm feeling much better since I know what has to be done. I'm going to this place in the Adirondacks, Sanatorium Quisisana. They seem to do wonders with that new cure, you might have read about it in the papers. Bermuda onions. No germ can live near a Bermuda onion, and that's a fact. Usually they cure you in four to six weeks and even in very bad cases they guarantee to get their patients well after three months at the most. I made my reservation for March fifteenth to make sure that I'll be in shape before Flori's next season starts. Anyway—here I have no peace of mind, I'm afraid every minute Joy might catch something from me——"

Maud's voice wavered and she got up abruptly and went to the bay window, pretending to rearrange the hyacinths. Mrs. Ballard's portrait stared waxy and regally down on her two daughters. There were the familiar little sounds that meant a house and a home, a childhood, all of the past. Father's foot-fall in the entrance hall, Beatrice calling an order to the cook, the door of the nursery falling softly shut, the dumbwaiter coming up from the kitchen with the well-remembered clattering of everyday china . . .

"Does Florian know?" asked Angelina.

"Not yet; so far I've told only Mousie. She'll help me to

break it to Flori, she's such a brick. He'll be terribly upset—and just when he needs to concentrate on his programme for the next season. I didn't turn out much of a bargain for him, poor Flori——”

“Don't worry about him, dear, it's bad for you. You must think of yourself now. I'll look after Florian while you're gone——”

“Thanks, Sis, but Mousie can do that better than anyone else. She'll keep him so busy he won't have time to mope. But there's the household—and—well, little Joy. I'm afraid she'll miss me, she is still too small to understand anything, and she can be quite difficult when she feels unhappy without quite knowing why, the poor, forlorn little thing.”

“Don't let that bother you either. I'll see to it that she doesn't miss you, not too much, I mean; I'll play with her and take her to the park and—you know how much I love her, I'll take care of her as if she were my own, I promise you. There, there—I'll take care of your baby and you take care of yourself, and that's a promise. You'll get rid of that silly little catarrh of yours quickly, and in a few weeks you'll be back, as good as new. Why, a big, sturdy girl like you! You mustn't make a great thing of it, it's really nothing, a catarrh—in fact I'm sure it will turn out to be a pleasant change for you to be away from the household for a little while. A sanatorium in the Adirondacks! It'll be like a first-class hotel, very de luxe—mercy me, it was quite a different case when I had my accident. That dreadful hospital in Hilo, the flies, the heat, the pains, and all those fractures, it's a wonder I'm still alive——”

She had put Maud back in her place. The big strong sister who could easily shake off any ailment in no time. On the other hand, maybe Maud wouldn't get well too quickly, a deeper layer of Angelina's mind hoped. Three months to win Maud's child over; three months under the same roof with Florian, who would be grateful for her company and lonesome, and lonesome men were so much more receptive——

Bermuda onions, she ruminated in a still more deeply hidden recess. And if those blessed Bermuda onions should fail? And if Maud should be incurably ill and Dr. Bryant was only keeping the truth from her? How long could a consumptive person live? That dreadful disease worked its most cruel ravages among people between twenty and thirty, Ann remembered having read in the *Ladies' Home Journal*. Even

before she got up and tenderly put her arm around Maud she had already buried her and married Florian. Not in a bridal gown of Alençon lace; not with a five-foot train. Just a quiet, tactful wedding, in an afternoon dress and a little flower hat. Blue chiffon perhaps—like the gown she had worn in Vienna? Blue has always been my colour, thought Angelina. . . .

Maud had gone and nothing changed until the night when Florian was forced to knock out Clyde Hopper.

Angelina had taken a long warm bath and gone to bed. It was cosy in the room which she and Maud had shared as girls. Now she shared it with Hopper, more or less—and not tonight, thank God. A day bed in the small sunroom of the round turret had been assigned to him for the frequent nights when he stayed out late. The less city life agreed with him, the more restless he became, the rarer the occasions when he returned to Clay Street at a civil hour. Ann was watching the disintegration of her husband without much regret or sympathy. Their marriage had begun with star sapphires, and after having bought himself a bride he kept on buying her forgiveness and acquiescence with expensive gifts and with solemn promises which he was incapable of keeping. The frozen silence in which she suffered him made him feel a wretch and an incurable reprobate and pushed him on and on in the old vicious circle where remorse and contrition could only be drowned by an exaggerated self-assurance to be found nowhere but in the drunken pit of another debauch. Not a very articulate man, Hopper tried to explain what was at the core of his problem: "Gawd, can't you see, Old Girl, a man has to let off steam somehow? If I were on the plantation, I'd sweat it out in the fields, I'd work it out of my system, but this loafing in an office isn't doing me a bloody bit of good. You know me, Annie, I'm not such a bad fellow, really——"

With merciless eyes Ann would observe Hopper's efforts at making himself attractive for her. Persian Miracle Oil in his thinning red hair. Dr. Birinski's Electro-Magnetic Wonder Belt around his waist—repulsive! He was trying to stay home after supper, to behave like a seraph in the hope of gaining admission to Ann's bedroom; reason enough for her not to encourage him too much on the thorny path of virtue.

Sleeping alone was such a luxurious relief when you were married. . . .

The embers stirred in the grate. Angelina turned off the light. She thought of Florian, also sleeping alone, in the room next door. During the first years of their marriage Hopper had frequently tried to make her understand that a man couldn't do for any length of time without a woman; it had disgusted her deeply. It didn't disgust her, though, to contemplate Florian's prolonged solitude and its exciting consequences. In the dark the embers in the grate threw a little red glow on the ceiling, which slowly and dreamily and very confusedly filled itself with pleasant pictures.

She was just about to fall asleep when the telephone in the entrance hall rang. By the time she had got out of bed and slipped on her kimono, Mousie and Florian had emerged from their respective rooms and rumbled downstairs. She went to the mirror and quickly let down her hair before stepping out on the upper landing. Mousie was talking into the wall telephone. Florian, still fully dressed, was standing behind her, his face very white against his old black velvet jacket.

"The goddamned fools gave me quite a shock with their ringing—where's my overcoat, Mousie?—I thought it had something to do with Maud. You'd better fix some strong coffee—and get the water heater going—he'll probably need a bath—" Angelina heard him say as she was rushing down the stairs. Mousie held out his overcoat for him.

"Who's calling? Did anything happen at the ranch?"

"No, nothing, some fool nonsense. You go back to bed and sleep, Angelina, we don't want you around," he said, rather unfriendly. Only then did he seem to become aware of her, her blonde hair rolling down her back, her kimono slipping open over her long, ruffled nightgown. "A tempest in a teapot," he said, friendlier. "I'll take care of it."

He pulled the chain from the front door and stepped out. She saw him lean his head against the wind; he had forgotten his hat as usual. The door slammed shut.

"What happened, Mousie? Where's he going?"

"It's all right," Mousie said dryly. "He'll fix it. It's nothing new to him, much as this may surprise you. He's had to get his brothers out of one mess or the other ever since he was seventeen, and save the Ambros decorum on top of it."

"Who's in a mess?" Angelina asked. But she knew anyway.

There would have been ample time to get dressed before

Florian brought Hopper home, but she did nothing of the sort. She brushed and perfumed her hair and tied it loosely back with a black velvet ribbon (nothing brings out the colour in blonde hair like black velvet: *The Ladies' Home Journal*). Before the mirror she toyed with her small box of rouge but decided that a natural pallor, heightened by the dark kimono with the scattered maple leaves, was more suitable to the occasion.

And there was the cab, coming to a stop under the portecochère. Her hands were cold. She went out on the upper landing and looked down, her hair hanging over the banister like somebody's hair in some fairy tale.

Hopper looked a bit worse than she expected. He let himself be dragged into the hall like a bag of flour, a soiled bag fallen off a waggon and picked out of the dirt. "Let's put him down here," Florian said to the cabbie and Hopper was for the time being placed on the hall bench. Angelina made a movement and Florian looked up. "Why don't you sleep, Angelina?"

"How could I? I was so worried——"

"It's nothing. Clyde had a little accident. He'll be all right in the morning. Please go to your room and let me take care of him, this is strictly a stag affair."

Angelina went down the stairs, "You don't need to be so confoundedly tactful; I've seen Hopper like this before," she said quietly. He had lost his overcoat and hat, his coat was torn, his trousers had come off the braces and were sadly sagging, stained and soiled with all sorts of dubious liquids. His fancy waistcoat was unbuttoned over the gaping, crumpled shirt, and behind his head the ends of his collar stuck obstinately up like rabbit's ears. His right eye sat on a cushion of swollen and discoloured flesh and a sticking plaster had been put over a cut running from his forehead to his cranium. But the worst was that the doctor at the police station had found it necessary to shave his head; without his enterprising shock of red hair he resembled the type of person seen on WANTED BY THE POLICE photos. Angelina, trembling with disgust, studied the devastation without mercy.

Hopper opened his eyes and grimaced as he touched the swelling under the right one. "Uhu!" he stated casually, and then his glance focused on Angelina. He sat up, shook his dizzy head, and made an instinctive and gentlemanly gesture as if to straighten his hair; he even tried to button his waist-

coat and smile winningly at his wife, "Sorry, Old Girl, frightfully sorry," he mumbled with a brave effort at gaining control of his consonants. "Rotten beer at the club. Simply ghastly—isn't it?"

There were many harsh things Angelina wanted to tell him but for Florian's sake she held on to herself. "Can you walk upstairs by yourself, or shall I help you?" was all she said.

"Never mind, Angelina, I'll get him into bed. Come, Clyde, hold on to me and let's go," Florian said; he wanted to hoist Hopper from the bench but Hopper, with the uncontrolled and unexpected strength of the drunk, pushed him back.

"You go to hell, I don't need you," he declared viciously.

Florian caught his balance and gave a short laugh. "As you please, sir," he said, apparently more amused than angry.

Hopper hauled himself up from the bench and stood very straight and proud for a moment before putting himself stiffly in motion. After three steps he fell flat on his face, the way only acrobats and drunks may fall without killing themselves. "Pity!" he remarked casually and gathered himself in on the floor; groping, he found a hold in Angelina's kimono and pulled himself up to a kneeling position. A shiver ran through her body but she still held down her loathing and only sent an imploring glance to Florian, a glance like a mute yet shrill cry for help.

Florian responded promptly.

"That'll be enough, Clyde," he said, putting his hands under Hopper's armpits and trying to lift him on to his feet; but Hopper resisted. On his knees, clutching Angelina's legs under the silken kimono, he looked up at her with a doglike expression that sat ill on his battered face.

"I apologize—deeply and humbly—I've broken my word of honour—I've made a pig of myself again—I know I'm not worthy of being your husband——" he blubbered and then the cork was out, releasing an overflow of contrition, thick and distasteful as castor oil, until he ended weeping, with his face pressed against her knees, his wet, hot breath soaking her nightgown.

Florian swallowed as if there were a bad taste in his mouth. Angelina saw it and stepped back, shaking off her husband's hands. "Don't touch me", she said frozenly. She felt like ice, every inch of her skin, the roots of her hair, her tongue, the roof of her mouth: ice. "Don't touch me or I don't know what I'll do——"

There occurred one of those sudden metamorphoses by which drunks are transported from one stage of their regrettable condition to the next. Hopper had been a limp and not very fragrant bundle the second before and in the next he was on his feet, his towering six feet two rigid with the insult. "Absolutely!" he said. "Precisely! Don't touch me! Righto, I won't. I'm not buying any of it, not any more. Not from you. What you've got to sell I get cheaper and much better from any little whore in town!" He wanted to remain calm and dignified, but some valve was broken and the pressure became too strong in him and once he had begun to let go of his pent-up misery and resentment he could not stop himself and what had begun as a meek defence turned into furious accusation. Swaying, with swinging fists and flailing arms he went against Angelina: to beat her up? To strangle her? To break her before she broke him?

She ran up the stairs, too frightened even to scream. A cry from Mousie: "Watch out, Flori! Don't hurt your hands!" And the crash of the bronze figure toppling off the newel post. Angelina turned her head. With buckling knees and long, swinging arms Hopper was leaning against the wall, a wounded and dangerous gorilla. Florian opposite this senseless bulk of strength appeared curiously detached, superiorly elegant.

"I'm sorry, Clyde," he said, shooting his left fist into Hopper's face.

Hopper slid down the wall and plumped in a heap on the floor. Florian was rubbing his knuckles. "Iodine," said Mousie and evaporated. Hopper came to, shook his head, touched his black eye, his chin, and without another word he pulled himself up the stairs by the banister, stumbled blindly past his wife, and disappeared down the corridor towards his celibate lair.

Angelina found Florian at her side and smiled up at him with quivering lips. Never had she been smaller and more helpless than at that moment.

"Angelina," he said, constrained, "I had no idea how matters stood——"

"Well—now you know," she said, hardly audible. "Now you know what my life has been all these years——" and only then did she open the dykes, and leaning her face against the black velvet jacket, she permitted herself to cry her silent, clear becoming tears. He put his arm around her shoulders

and patted her hair. Warmth, bitter scent of cigarettes, Cuir de Russie, Florian.

"Here is the iodine," said Mousie, suddenly being there; and Mousie in a negligee was an abominable sight.

"Dear me, you didn't hurt your hand? And on my account—oh, Flori, I'm so sorry—let me take care of it."

"Well, good night, children," said Mousie, "and see you don't stay up too late, Flori." There was a mocking eloquence in the way she closed the door of the guest-room. Angelina examined Florian's knuckles, from which a few drops of blood had begun to trickle.

"Come in here, the lamps on my dresser give a better light—if you don't mind entering a lady's bedchamber," she said, trying to sound flippant. A whole summertime of her perfume, Jasmin de Corse, hung in the room. "Sorry, my hands are so cold," she said and let a few straggling tears roll down her face. "Does it sting?" she asked when the muscles in Florian's cheeks tightened.

"Did Clyde ever attack you before, the way he did to-night?"

"Did he? Florian, if I were to tell you the things he has done to me! The brutality of it, the disgrace——" She put her arms on the dresser and her head on her arms and wept.

Florian stood awkward, defenceless, before her grief. "You don't care for him?" She shook her head in violent protest. "But, *Hergott im Himmel*, why did you marry him Angelina?" he asked.

She lifted her face, she saw herself pale and lovely, in the dressing mirror, and looking deep into Florian's eyes, she whispered: "You ask me why I married him? You, of all people, Florian? As if you didn't know——"

"It's getting damnably late, and we all need our sleep," Florian said in uncomfortable retreat.

"I can't sleep, not now. I'm too upset, and I'm terribly frightened. Please, Flori, don't leave me alone now, stay just another minute——"

"Wait, I'll get you a sleeping powder, I've some in my room," he said—a man looking for a fire-escape—but she clung to him, trembling, shaking, desperate. "I'm so cold, that's because I'm afraid of him, what am I to do if he comes in here and takes it out on me that you knocked him down? You don't know what a brute he is when he's drunk, you can't leave me alone now, you must help me or I don't know

what'll happen. Oh, Flori, I'm so frightened, and I'm so terribly, terribly cold."

"Steady, steady now, steady——" Florian said, to himself as much as to her. He took her gently to her bed, made her lie down, and pulled the blanket up to her face, treating her altogether as though she were his little daughter to be tucked in. He stroked her hair and her shoulders, he raised her hands to his mouth and breathed his warmth into them. Angelina relaxed at last, she closed her eyes, felt sunlight on her eyelids. It was lovely.

"I thought that I hated you, Flori," she whispered. "I know that I should hate you. But I don't. No, I don't, Florian I——"

"Try to sleep now; good night, my dear," he said abruptly, "in the morning everything looks different."

As he reached the door he heard that she was softly laughing. "Florian, am I wrong or are you trying all the time to avoid me? But why? You aren't afraid of me?" she asked, back there in bed.

"All right," he said, hiding behind a cigarette, "let's suppose that I'm a miserable, knee-weak coward. But so help me God, yes, I am afraid of you. And of myself too, if you must know. Good night. Now we are upset; in the morning everything looks different," and the door closed behind him.

In the morning neither Hopper nor Florian appeared at the breakfast table. Only Mousie.

"Your husband wants to be excused," she said, putting an undue amount of sugar into her coffee. "You know what they say in San Francisco: No real gentleman feels well in the morning."

"And Florian?"

"Oh, I almost forgot; regards from Flori. He took the early Tiburon Ferry, he wants to stay for the time being in the villa in Belvedere, and work on his Mendelssohn concerto. I'll have Grandma Ballard's old upright over there tuned, damn it, and make it do. Flori thinks it would be too embarrassing for Hopper to face him after last night."

"Embarrassing? For Hopper?" Angelina cried, dumbfounded.

"Of course. You can't expect these two men to live peacefully under one roof, can you? Certainly not while you're around shoving rockets under their respective behinds, dearie."

As for Hopper, there was a little scandal about the brawl and police raid in Lung Fo's gambling den and a little noise in the papers and a little gossip in the clubs and a little scandalized whispering at ladies' luncheons. And a week later he sailed for Hawaii; officially to attend to some business, and unofficially to be called on the carpet by the almighty sugar king who owned, among other plantations, Leihana and who thought it advisable to keep Clyde Hopper removed for a little while from the scene of scandals and temptations. After all, Hopper was one of his best men and you couldn't let him simply go to the dogs on the Mainland. . . .

April 17 was Angelina's birthday, it was her day and her great evening; by a coincidence it was also the evening of the Great Finale, before the curtain was rung down over the lusty, boisterous, magnificent show that was San Francisco.

Once during the week Florian had come out of his retreat to visit his little daughter. He and Angelina had taken little Joy downtown to buy her new shoes, they had been romping and playing with her and later they were sitting on the nursery floor and, with the child between them as though she were their own, they had kept a harmless patter going like the good old friends they were. The precarious night of Hopper's downfall was never mentioned.

"Before I forget," Florian said, "I had a wire from Maud. Orders to take care of your birthday, since she can't do it herself and Papa Ballard won't be back from the ranch. Congratulations and all that."

"Thanks, Florian. That's sweet of Maud. I was just beginning to feel sorry for myself. I didn't think anyone would remember and I love people to make a great big fuss over my getting older."

"All right, how does your Majesty intend to celebrate? Any special wishes, within the limits and possibilities of a poor musician, that is?"

"Will you take me to the opera on Tuesday? Will you, Florian?"

There was only a second's hesitation before he said evenly: "But of course, Angelina. You couldn't give me greater pleasure—"

AM of San Francisco was at the great Gala Performance of

the Metropolitan Opera in the Opera House on Mission Street. Everybody had come in full dress and with festive anticipation, to see, to be seen, and, incidentally, to hear *Carmen*. In her evening gown of black velour chiffon, her shoulders bare, her small face a flare of white heat under the enormous black opera hat, Angelina made her entrance at Florian's side, and there was, at long last, that trail of whispering, that phosphorescent wake she had been craving all those years. "Don't you know him? That's Florian Ambros—the famous violinist—and who is the beautiful woman he is with, the lucky dog? His wife? No, that's the younger of the two Ballard sisters. Did you see her necklace? Sensational! What a striking couple they are, those two! Don't they look as if they were simply made for each other . . ."

There was that particular electricity in the atmosphere which made the children of the Bay City livelier, gayer, more sparkling than any others, gave them their singular sweep, the broad gusto of living. Angelina too felt reborn by the vibrant air after the lava-slow frustrated existence of Leihana. She looked around through her long-handled opera glasses and thought that nowhere in the world could an audience like this one be found. Children of luck and success they were, demanding and accepting only the very best of everything—in wine, in food, in clothes, in women. Connoisseurs of every luxury, lovers of culture and art and—well, everything. "Isn't it wonderful, Flori? I simply can't imagine anything like our opera anywhere else in the world. And don't say Vienna," she added quickly as his left eyebrow went up, because Vienna I've had and it didn't impress me, not much."

"Never mind Vienna, Angelina, this is quite splendid in its own way—especially when you contemplate that all this devilish elegance and all-out superiority has grown in such a hurry from yesterday's wild sandhills. However, may I point out that in various parts of the world there exist opera houses where they don't throw beer advertisements on the curtain," he said and there was a sharp little bite behind his amiable little smile.

"You're beastly. Sometimes I'd like to hit you."

"Really? The beauty and the beast? But don't forget that in the fairy tale the beast is a sentimental fool at heart——"

All during the first two acts Angelina was waiting for the intermission which to her, as to not a few other spectators, was the better part of the performance. However, there were

moments when the emotional impact of the opera threw her off balance. During Don José's flower aria she could not help searching for Florian's hand; she found it, bare of its glove, as if waiting for hers.

Je ne sentais qu' un désir,
Un seul désir, un seul espoir——

Happiness. A four-minute happiness so intense, so complete, it hurt. Fremstad? Of course, Fremstad is no Calvé, the connoisseurs of San Francisco were saying, but Caruso! Bravo, Caruso, bis, bis, encore, bravo, bravo, Caruso—and the entire house burst wide open in an explosion of enthusiasm, melting the whole audience into one, from the La Torres in their box, and the Menlo Park crowd and the Bensinger clan in the dress circle, and the Frankel tribe, third row orchestra, to the last little Italian fruit dealer squeezed in the outmost corner of the highest gallery, fusing their voices in one great roaring unison.

The show was not over when the singers had taken their last bow and the lights of the chandelier were turned off; it was simply transferred to the Palace Hotel, with more happy parading and merry showing off, the effervescent feeling of high life sharpened still more by that ever-present hot, spicy, alert sense of competition. Florian and Angelina were guests at the Bensinger table, and Angelina brushed past the Frankels with a nod of polite detachment to take her seat at old Mr. Bensinger's right. By now she had forgotten that a certain Mr. Hopper existed and that it was Maud's place of honour she was occupying only by proxy. "Won't you let me in on the joke?" Florian asked, sizing up the curiously absorbed smile on her face. He was sitting at her left, the chairs stood close, their shoulders touched.

"I just remembered the evening of your first concert. I wanted to die because I was wearing my first long dress, absolutely sensational, and you hadn't seen me in it. You didn't know that I was madly in love with you when I was fifteen, or did you?"

"No, I didn't know; as a rule I'm too busy and not conceited enough to notice the mad passions I occasionally arouse in very young ladies' bosoms." He watched the dance of the tiny bubbles in his champagne glass; rising, whirling, bursting. And gone. "Look at that crazy dance," he said, more to himself than to her. "No form, no sequence, no continuity. Not

much sense, but pretty. Very human. What was it you asked me? No, I didn't know. Maybe I'm simply stupid."

"Maybe you are, at that," she said, turning her polite attentions to Mr. Bensinger for a change.

"... so I told the mayor, I'll eat my hat, I told him, if San Francisco isn't capable of raising fifty thousand dollars for those poor, stricken Italians. Why, Telegraph Hill alone collected—how much did you say . . .?" All around the table they were discussing the recent disaster in Italy, where hundreds of thousands of people had been made homeless by the eruption of Vesuvius. Angelina's napkin slid to the floor and Florian bent down to pick it up. Under the table he was touching her instep, he let his hand rest there for an endless burning moment—and if this was not an accident it was the most shameless caress Angelina could imagine. A shiver ran down her spine and she took refuge in her champagne glass. "Your napkin, madame——" Florian said innocently as he bobbed up again. Suddenly his face seemed drained, white, an exhausted after-the-concert face.

"Our poor globe seems to have had a bad case of the stomach cramps," someone was saying at the other end of the table. "More than one thousand dead in the Formosa earthquake, the hurricane in Papeete, old Vesuvius staging another Pompeii, all of it within the space of two weeks; and heaven knows what's coming next . . ." But the list of disasters remained incomplete as there were calls for Silence, silence, please! and from one of the galleries surrounding the Palm Court a melody took flight on silver wings: Caruso! Caruso! Caruso! A whisper, a shout, a hailstorm of applause.

Caruso's thanks to the hospitable Bay City, Caruso singing for San Francisco.

It was the climax of an unforgettable night, the most spectacular display that is always saved for the end of the fireworks. It was the peak, the summit, the great apotheosis of the great show before the curtains fell and it was all over. . . .

Old O'Shaughnessy was waiting with the carriage. The night had turned warm and for a change there was not a stir in the air. Angelina pulled out her hatpins and freed her hair of the high superstructure of the hat; she peeled off her eighteen-button gloves and slipped her hand into Florian's. "The snake sheds her skin," he said, still teasing. "Did you ever touch a snake? It's quite a surprise. They're warm, you know,

you don't expect it, but they are. And so smooth—not so smooth as your arm, though."

Angelina was wonderfully dizzy. "I think I'm a bit tipsy," she reported. "Are you tipsy too?"

"Yes, I'm a bit tipsy myself."

Angelina giggled. "Never mind, Flori, it's my birthday. And I'm terribly happy. Are you, too, happy?"

Florian seemed to contemplate the question and then he announced that, yes, he, too, was happy. For a few minutes, up Powell Street and along Union Square, Angelina was married to him and they were riding home together——

"Yes, I am happy; I had a very good letter from Maud today he said, suddenly sobering up. Angelina knew all about that letter. For two days it had been on the silver salver of the hall table, waiting for Florian to come to town. Naturally, she had steamed it open and perused its contents. Maud was getting better—another three or four weeks—remind Peggy to put moth balls in your fur-lined overcoat—kiss little Joy from me—quite a married, uninspiring letter, Angelina had thought, closing it carefully again. Oh, shucks, why did he have to bring up Maud just now?

No light under the porte-cochère. "Do you want O'Shaughnessy to wait or are you staying in town?"

"Thanks, O'Shaughnessy, I won't need you. I'd like to walk a few steps."

The air did not stir. Strange night. Breathless night. "Do you have the key to the house, Flori? Oh, but it's dark in the hall, Mousie forgot to leave the lights on——"

"Wait, I'll switch it on for you. There. Good night, Angelina, and thanks for the evening. I must hurry, Jake Watts is waiting for me, he promised to take me across the bay with his boat."

"Jake Watts? Do I know him?"

"Probably. He owns the Tiburon Inn and he has his own little tug. We've become good friends."

"Let him wait a few minutes, your friend. Don't run away so abruptly, Flori, please. I know it's silly—but I'm always afraid of entering a house at night. It's dark on the upper landing. Dear me, I'm so dizzy I don't know how to get myself upstairs."

The old, old dream. Carry me, lift me and carry me and close the doors behind us. Dimly she saw herself in the hall mirror with Florian standing behind her as she let her chin-

chilla stole slide to the floor. Her shoulders blossomed white from the black dress.

"What are you trying to do to me? Arson is a crime, or don't you know that?" Florian said; it was a taut little effort at joking.

"Listen, Flori: there's something I've wanted to ask you for a long time. But you must give me a real answer."

"The truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God—*Heilige Maria und Joseph*, I shouldn't have drunk all that champagne——"

"Tell me, Florian: why did you marry Maud?"

"Why did I—what a question! Because I love her."

"That's not true, I don't believe it! Maud is a dear and I love her and she's the best sister there is—she's everybody's sister, yes, yes, yours too! But is that all you want? A sweet, kind, big sister? Why can't you be honest? You married her because you were grateful, because she got you the violin you wanted—but, God Almighty, love is something different——"

He was taking her bare shoulders in his grip and shaking her. "And what do you know about love?" he asked. "What do you know about Maud? *Mein Gott*, Maud—that's giving and giving and giving—that's rich and warm and generous and restful and—oh hell, don't let's discuss Maud, if you don't mind. You'd never understand her. But I want you to know it and to believe it: I love Maud."

"All right, then I'll ask you something else. If you love Maud so much, why did you kiss me—that time in Vienna and don't say it didn't mean anything and you don't remember; because I know you do. You kissed me as if you meant it—ten minutes before you got engaged to my sister. Why?"

"I'll tell you why. Because you asked for it. Because you wanted to be kissed. Because you had put me in a situation where a gentleman can't possibly say no to a lady."

"I see. For no other reason. You didn't want to kiss me? You don't want to kiss me now . . .?"

They were still standing before the mirror, under the dim lights of the entrance hall. With sinking eyes Angelina saw those two in the mirror fuse into one. Sliding down the arc of a rainbow, landing in a wine-red reeling darkness, so hungry, she thought, so hungry, she whispered, so hungry, so hungry, and still and insatiably hungry while time stopped and only their hard, angry, furious embrace lasted. Florian was the

first to come out of it. He stepped back abruptly, almost pushing her away from himself. "All right——" he said hoarsely. "Now you know it. You knew it all the time, didn't you? Are you satisfied now?"

"I knew it. Always. You don't love Maud, it's me you love. I love you and you love me and—Florian——"

"I want you, Goddamit, I want you to have, but that's something different. Don't let's get into mischief, Angelina darling, we're married, both of us, don't let's make a mess of it. I—forgive me. I lost my head for a moment. It shan't happen again. Sleep well, dear—forgive and forget. Good night——"

"Why don't you stay in town tonight? It's terribly late, your friend Jake Watts will have left by now and there's no more ferry——"

"No, Jake promised to wait for me. I'll run straight down to the Wharf, it'll take me only a few minutes. Good night, Angelina. I might come over next Sunday and take you and little Joy to the park——"

No one, no one in the whole world, would ever know and appreciate the admirable countenance of Angelina in an impossible situation. She opened the front door for him and lightly brushed over the sleeve of his opera coat. "I always thought it was blue," she said.

"Blue? What was blue?"

"The coat Joseph left with Potiphar's wife," she said, smiling. "Good night, dear."

She never got it quite clear in her mind whether she had been awake a few minutes before or whether it was the initial jolt that woke her up. But then she never had a clear recollection of those first minutes of the earthquake. There was the noise, not like thunder, rather like the vicious snarling of a monstrous animal as big as the world twitching its skin to rid itself of the human vermin. The bed was dancing over a nauseating emptiness, the room, the house, the city, perhaps the entire earth. Vicious—a vicious, mean, interminable attack, directed against her, Angelina Hopper née Ballard, personally. All her perfume bottles and little jars crashed from the dresser, her jewel case followed, split open, spilled star sapphires; then the mirror flung itself, cracking, splintering, to the heaving floor. The dresser skipped towards her bed, the

bed with her in it capered away from the wall towards the dresser in a crazy quadrille. The picture above the headboard dropped off the wall on to her chest, a piece of plaster from the ceiling hit sharp and stinging into her face. Her eyes were smarting with the coarse dust, her teeth bit on gritty lumps of plaster; and still the ground was rolling, shaking, capriciously dancing beneath her, the monstrous earthquake dog was still snarling; there was no end to it, there would never be an end. Angelina was completely paralysed, and even if the thought of escape had occurred to her, she would have been incapable of moving. Yet these stiff legs and arms of hers were flung in one direction and another like those of a rag doll in the hands of a naughty child.

After all this had lasted for a year or two, it gave a last wrenching twist and with a groan of tortured timber it subsided, abruptly and against all expectations: she was still alive. "Dear me, an earthquake," she said aloud; "and quite a good one." This was, by God, not her first earthquake and in San Francisco it was considered bad form to make a fuss about those little whims of the native ground. Now it was over. And only now did the sounds of it penetrate her consciousness. Joy was miserably crying back there in the nursery, and Beatrice was thumping around calling in her Sicilian contralto to various saints. The noise of crashing, falling, roaring destruction had not ceased with the tremor; on the contrary, it grew in a steady, inconceivable crescendo, grinding timber, screeching metal, shrill landslide of broken glass.

It was not quite daybreak yet; a sky, green as an unripe apple, hung in front of the windows, and while Angelina still stared at it, one of the two windows loosened itself, frame and all, and disappeared, to land with a thin, splintering crash on the roof of the porte-cochère. The numbness of her limbs gave a little and she got up, carefully stepping across the jagged debris on the floor. Her little watch, resting in a tiny embroidered slipper pinned to the headboard, was undamaged but it had stopped. Five-thirteen; what a time to have an earthquake! Automatically her trembling fingers wound it up again. Little Joy was quiet by now and a moment later Beatrice opened the door. "Bad——" she shouted. "Isa bad shake, musta stand between da doors is best." Her long, heavy breasts made her coarse shirt billow, her broad petticoats looked like a much-used tent, and on her arms she had Joy wrapped in the old black shawl. The baby was wide-eyed

with fright, hiccuping with excitement, sucking her thumb for consolation.

"I'm coming; you take care of the child in the meantime," Angelina said with much control. "It was only an earthquake. It's over now."

For a moment she stood in the middle of the room collecting herself. What to save first? Her jewellery. Her fur coats—the new sealskin, and of course, the chinchilla stole and muff. With one hand she rang the bell for Peggy, who did not respond, with the other she tore her dresses from the closet, and then she dropped everything as it occurred to her to secure her jewels in the safe that stood, handsomely disguised as a mahogany commode, on the upper landing. She knew the combination by heart but when she rushed outside, her hands filled with star sapphires, she found that the mechanism of the lock was jammed.

Thank heavens, it's all over by now, she told herself; but it was not. The earth was still trembling or the floor was tilting beneath her, making her madly slide and stumble towards the staircase. The door to the sitting-room had sprung open; in there Mrs. Ballard's portrait hung lopsided from one single nail and all the hyacinth glasses were smashed; crushed flowers covered the rug, their sweet perfume mixed with the dusty smell of fallen plaster. The panes of the bay window were gone, and while Angelina was taking all this in with one glance it grew darker, as though an enormous shadow were falling across the room, together with the scream of twisting timbers, a deafening crash as of an explosion; then a thick cloud of dust rose into the air like smoke. The back of the Emmett's house across their own small garden had collapsed and suddenly you looked into the entrails of the private life of that family as you saw on the stage into rooms lacking their fourth wall.

The next thing Angelina discovered was herself standing on the street, and while she believed herself to be very calm and collected, she had obviously forgotten to put on a dress. She was in her nightgown, the blue satin negligee with the Watteau pleat thrown over it and, inexplicably, she had her opera hat carefully pinned to her hair. On her right foot she wore a bedroom slipper, on her left the high-heeled opera pump of last night. She was dragging her chinchilla stole after her and in her hands she still held the sapphire necklace. Beatrice, with Joy on her arm, was telling her in turbulent Italian to stay in

the front door, the only safe spot, *Madonna mia*, don't run around in the street, crazy fool, can't you see the house she shall come down? Little Joy was stretching her fat short arms out to her. "Annelina, Annelina, you want Annelina to carry you."

During the last few weeks Angelina had taken endless trouble to win over the little girl's affection and by now Joy was almost too attached to her. The small high voice stopped her and she turned to take the child from Beatrice's arms. Undecided, hesitating little huddles of people were standing in front of every house, most of them dressed in odd improvisations, and with stunned smiles on their ashen faces. Angelina, too, was smiling. "Good morning, Mrs. Hopper," someone said. "Loudest alarm clock I ever heard, wasn't it?"

"Good morning, good morning, Mr. Gallagher. Yes, quite a bit of a shake," she replied in the very best San Francisco tradition. Mr. Gallagher, their neighbour, wore striped pyjama pants combined with last night's tail coat. "Maybe now we'll finally get the street repairs for which we have petitioned these last eight months," he said, rather pleased. The pavement was broken into a wavy pattern, a wide crack ran across it a few yards farther down, and at the corner the rails of the cable car were torn loose, a twisted skein of flimsy yarn. "Let's see if the shake made the morning papers," some wit remarked, unfolding a smudged sheet he had pulled from the rubble. Indeed, the morning papers had been delivered just before the tremor. It seemed to make everybody feel better, and some of the people were turning back into their houses to begin clearing out the debris. There were calls for maids and servants but all voices sounded strangely thin and powerless against the distant roar that rose from the districts south of Market Street: a constant great organ sound as of a waterfall or a loudly booming surf. Now a few young men came running around the corner of Taylor Street with a brief report about the partly collapsed Emmett home. No one killed or missing; the younger Emmett boy had a broken leg or something. They were carrying him past on a door that had come loose and served well enough as an improvised stretcher. "Take him in here, our house is okay," Mr. Gallagher offered hospitably. "I'll telephone at once for the doctor—if the telephone is not out of order, that is."

Next there appeared with a high clattering of hoofs a large, mad phantom horse, crazily streaking down from Jones Street,

slithering on his haunches and catching himself again, until at the corner of Mason his hoofs got stuck in the cracked pavement and he dropped as though felled by a shot. "That one'll have to go to the glue factory," one of the boys said with a grin. "Wish they had delivered the milk instead of the morning paper," said a woman in a man's overcoat. "I bet it's all been spilled and what am I to give the children for breakfast?" Then a policeman popped up, their own policeman, Joe Salinas, whose beat covered the four blocks between California and Jackson. "What's new, Joe? How's it look downtown? Much damage?"

"Biggest little shake I can remember," Joe said placidly. "Seems a few houses came down in the Mission district. But you folks up here are okay. Them swells on Nob Hill wouldn't stand for any trouble in their part of the city, would they now? Well, ma'am, I suggest you all go home and get breakfast ready."

It was at that moment that the first foreboding of the coming disaster reached their street. The air, which had been grey and thick with the stirred-up dust of the elaborate plaster façades shaken off flimsy wooden houses, underwent a change; this air, still growing denser and darker, carried something new to them; they sniffed at it, it entered their nostrils and their throats: the bitter odour of smoke and fire. The sky was not green any longer but of a grey opaqueness; over the bay the sun came up, red like the segment of a huge split pomegranate. Suddenly a wild scream of a hundred voices, yet distant like a back-stage cry in a theatre, pierced the haze, and a moment later a servant girl, young, mad-eyed, crazed with fear, was racing down from Nob Hill, shrieking: "Christ Almighty—the city's on fire—we're lost—we're all lost—San Francisco is burning——" and, shrieking, she disappeared down the steep fall of California Street. On Angelina's little watch, which she discovered pinned to her negligee, it was five thirty-two.

That was how those three days started—like some of those pitiless dreams which begin quite ordinarily, calm at first and deceptively harmless, yet slowly, slowly, inexorably, they tighten and swell and become a ghastly chase through unknown dimensions into a nightmare of fears and horrors and final annihilation.

Little Joy had begun to cry again, with her fierce, inarticulate instinct of a small frightened animal. "Be quiet, honey,

be a good little girl, we're going to fix you some breakfast," Angelina told her, kissing the top of the damp little head. "Be quiet, for God's sake!" she shouted impatiently as the child clutched her breast. "Take her off my hands, Beatrice, she's too heavy for me, my arms are getting numb. And tell Peggy to sweep up the rubbish in the hall!" A slow anger began to boil in Angelina as she surveyed the mess and muddle inside the house. "Let me talk to Lee Ong; today he must help with the cleaning, he's the only man in the house."

The only man in the house, indeed. There she was, left all by herself, saddled with a house that might come crashing down on them any moment, and a child to take care of in the midst of an earthquake. And while she was going through hell, Hopper was probably having himself a splendid time with The Chaps at Leihana; Father, off to the ranch, getting his shady bit of fun with that Gomez woman; and Maud having breakfast in bed and a pleasant morning, thank you. But what about Florian? After all, Joy was not her baby but Florian's, and if he had stayed in town last night instead of running away like a blazing fool, he would at this critical moment be where he belonged. Well, she calmed herself, he'll take the first ferry and be here soon, and then we shall see.

For the time being she tried to return to her daily routine as if nothing had happened. I'll take a warm shower, brush my hair, get dressed, have breakfast, play with Joy, she thought. Indeed, in those early morning hours all of San Francisco seemed driven by the same instinct: to ignore the earthquake, now that it was past; pretend that nothing much out of the ordinary had happened and hope, illogically and pathetically, that nothing much was going to happen if you only went about your regular business as on any other day. In the poor quarters housewives lit their stoves to cook breakfast for their men—with not an inkling that there were no more chimneys to restrain the flames which would soon break out of the ramshackle walls and burn down entire streets. Lunch-boxes were packed and children sent to schools which had turned into rubble and red dust of bricks. Bankers went to their banks and neat clerks to their offices to find only the twisted skeletons of dying skyscrapers on Montgomery and Sansome streets. A little later the wealthy commuters from the Peninsula aboard the eight-thirty train were stopped on the twisted rails at the outskirts, from where they unbelievably stared at the wall of fire between themselves and their

city. The waters of the bay were dyed a streaky black where the coal sheds of the railway had tumbled into the harbour.

Almost against her expectations Angelina found the water heater in the bathroom functioning; but while she was slowly relaxing under the warm shower the stream of water turned into an even thinner trickle, there was some hissing, a little puff of scalding steam, and the dry apparatus might have exploded had not Beatrice rushed in and turned off the gas. This, then, was another first signal of a yet new calamity, and increasingly, menacingly, the worst of them: no water.

No water, no milk, no bread delivered, no food to be bought. Authorities, going from house to house in the person of Policeman Joe Salinas, announced that it was strictly forbidden to heat a stove, use gas or electricity, not even candlelight was permitted, not even to strike a match inside of a house. "All pipes are burst, water mains, gas mains, the whole goddamned town's on fire," he said tersely, hardly watching his language.

The household was in full disintegration. Peggy had disappeared like a wraith. Lee Ong, more dignified, at least announced his exit; dressed in all his coats, one bulkily on top of the other, a sack of flour hung over his back, a side of bacon slung across his chest like a bandolier, and a few miraculously undamaged bottles tied in a cluster to his belt, he reported calmly: "Me go 'way, missy. Go to my famb'ly, velly bad quakie, no food, my famb'ly velly much hungly. Goo'by, missy, goo'by, baby. Me so solly." He had an old sea chest tied to a rope and off he went, pulling it bumpily, grindingly, after him. Angelina took her opera glasses that had remained unbroken in their case, and went up the attic stairs: no need to lift the trap door to the flat part of the roof; there was a yawning gap through which Angelina swung herself up to survey the growing disaster.

Spread out before her eyes, which by and by began to smart, were the burning parts of the city. Quivering red patches here and there, in the Mission district. South of Market Street. Thick wads of blackish-grey smoke were inadequately covering some scarlet flickers like frayed, soiled cotton bandages on bloody wounds. Still, the brave slim tower of the Ferry Building stood erect, and that was a good sign, wasn't it? Still, the ferryboats, busy little water bugs, were scuttling across the bay; still and all, if things got worse, one could take the Tiburon Ferry and somehow get across to Belvedere. Beatrice was beg-

ging and wheedling: "Why we don't go 'way while is time, Angelina? Go to Grandmama Ballard villa, isa much more better. Mr. Ambros, he dere, Miss Mousie, she dere; we waita here too long, we geta roasted like marron, isa crazy, Bambina mia!"

"If you're afraid, you may go. I'm not holding you. *Va Via!* Do you hear me? *Va Via!* I don't need you!" Angelina shouted angrily.

But Beatrice only laughed her deep-throated laughter. "Sure you needa Beatrice, Stupidina," she said, patting Angelina's head as if she were still in her swaddling clothes.

Yet it was not stupidity that caused Angelina to stay and wait it out in the old Ballard home. This was where she belonged, the only place where she felt comparatively safe. This was where Father would expect to find her when he arrived from Stockton, as he certainly would by the first train as soon as the bad news reached the ranch. And if not Father, then most certainly Florian. And if, for some unfathomable reason, Florian should not come soon, then at least good, reliable old O'Shaughnessy. (But by that time, shortly before noon, O'Shaughnessy had already been badly wounded while doing rescue work and was on his way to the Mechanics' Pavilion, whose fairgrounds had been turned into a first-aid station, which in turn was soon to become a flaming morgue.) Who did come to look after Angelina, however, was young O'Shaughnessy, wearing the badge of the quickly organized Citizen's Guard, and oozing importance and a peculiarly Irish brand of optimism. "Just wanted to see how the little lady was doing, and I figured maybe you would be offering me a wee bit of refreshment, I'm so parched I feel thistles growing in my gullet. First order the Mayor gave: close all saloons and taverns, but good and tight. Makes San Francisco truly a dry city, doesn't it? Doesn't prevent the gay revellers from having themselves a fine time, though, at the St. Francis, it's all on the house today and they might as well be generous and repent their sins. Who knows if a single stone will be left by tomorrow! Worse luck that the fire chief was one of the first to be knocked out and down. Caught a ton of steel or bricks on his head—they say he's in a bad way, the poor lad. Without him the Fire Department are scuttling about like a centipede with its head cut off. But we'll stop the fire, don't you be worrying, Annie, we've got it all beautifully organized and under control at City Hall. We'll have to be dynamiting some

fine buildings, it's a crying shame, but that's the only thing to be done as long as there isn't enough water in this town to drown a gnat in. Call Building's going down just now. Well, the Golden Gate is still there, that's the main thing. Now, how about a little refreshment for an old friend of yours?"

His eyes were bloodshot from the downtown heat and smoke, but he seemed quite elated; obviously he had been trying before this to quench his thirst, and not with water either. Ann went into the dining-room to look for some potables. Both the crystal decanters had dropped from the sideboard, spilling red and white wine on the floor, but she found two undamaged bottles on Father's *tantalus*.

"I don't understand anything about drinks, but perhaps these will do? The glass is chipped, though."

"Great! Almost the makings of a Sazarac. Well—here's to you, Annie, my sweetheart, and to all we love. We're all in the same boat, but this is still San Francisco: you can knock us out but you can't keep us down!"

"What do you advise me to do, Johnny? Remain in the house? Or take the ferry and hole up in Grandma Ballard's shack for the time being?"

"Take the ferry? You don't know what you're saying, my lass. You stay put, by all means. You have no idea what's going on at the Ferry Building; every single Jap and Mex and Mongol pushing and shoving, it's a gruesome free-for-all, the whole scum of the town is down there kicking each other off the jetty. It's a place for mad dogs, not for a sweet little lady like my Annie. But don't you worry, you're well off where you are, and if things should be taking a turn for the worse I'll come myself and take care of you. But now I must be running along—say, Annie, don't you think I deserve a teeny-weeny little kiss, just for good luck? No? Okay, whatever you say, sweetheart. So long——"

Angelina went back to the roof; everywhere on the house-tops stood motionless dark groups of people, silent, watchful. By now Chinatown at the foot of the hill was a sea of flames, and actually Chinatown was not so very far away. But, thank heavens, Telegraph Hill clung unscathed to its perpendicular cliffs, and the bay, the islands behind the haze, and far-off Contra Costa appeared incredibly peaceful, and, in an emergency, easy enough to reach. There were small tremors from time to time, the sleeping earthquake dog flicking a fly off its

skin—but they seemed insignificant and passed unheeded. An earthquake was such a mild, almost friendly disturbance compared with the ruthless, incalculable fury of the fire. The fire was the bad thing, the fire chewing huge chunks out of the city's writhing body, now here, now there, one burning area after the other spilling over like a red, hot, steaming liquid, spreading until it merged with the next, as if following a viciously mapped-out yet arbitrary plan of destruction. There was that perpetual roar and crackle and groan and hiss of the holocaust, a noise so steady it had become almost inaudible. A strange silence, torn time and again by the crash of an explosion, a sudden shriek, a thousand-voiced outcry of people foundering somewhere in the sea of flames.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the wind changed and the fire was driven north. Over each boom and blast there rose another white parasol of dust, opening up against the smoke-blackened sky. New vistas replaced the dynamited buildings, wide avenues of ruin, all of it dominated by the half-destroyed dome of City Hall. The town's face had changed so much within those last few hours that one might easily lose one's way among streets that were no longer there. Angelina watched the advancing holocaust through her graceful little mother-of-pearl opera glasses; it seemed not quite possible that only last night she had through these same glasses watched a brilliant opera performance. Again and again she had to rub the smarting tears from her eyes; again and again she groped her way downstairs to search kitchen and bathroom in vain for a trickle of water. Her eyes burning, lips parched by the furnace heat that rose from burning Chinatown, skin cracking, ears deafened, with all clear thoughts blotted out, she was waiting for Florian to come and save her and his child. But Florian didn't come. If Johnny could, why couldn't Florian? But then, Johnny was a real man and Florian was only a musician, weak, vague, thoughtless, unreliable, incomprehensible, obdurate; not a man but only the detestable, ever-eluding shadow of one. Mercy, how she hated him, and, All you Angels, how she wished he were here, and, Great Lord, don't let anything have happened to him! But with Florian you could never be sure; maybe he was at this very moment safe and sound in Grandma Ballard's villa, clucking over his precious fiddle; maybe he cared more for that fiddle than for his own child. But on the other hand—maybe he was over there, waiting for her as desperately as

she was waiting for him here, and neither of them could get across the bay? What a death trap of a city, this glorious San Francisco! Was there another town in the world where you could not get in or out without navigating across miles and miles of water? No wonder all San Franciscans had a streak of madness in them. . . .

Little Joy was crying incessantly, "You are hot, you are thirsty, your eyes hurt," and not a drop of water left in the tap, no milk in the house. Even the little fountain in the conservatory was cracked and empty, nothing but a bit of green scum with four slithering, gasping, dying goldfish in it. Angelina, standing up to her ankles in splintered window glass, pressed her hands to her ears, not to hear the baby's whimpering. Too bad I can't offer her a Sazarac too, she thought and began to laugh and stopped herself and pushed her own laughter down into her own throat. "No hysterics now, if you please," she said aloud, "or we're all going crazy."

And then an improbable sound struck at her numb ears: the hall telephone was ringing.

The very normalcy of the familiar shrill tinkle made it appear unreal. In the morning Angelina had tried again and again to put some calls through—to Father, to the Tiburon Inn, which habitually took messages for the villa, to various friends in town, but the telephone had been completely dead. Now it was ringing. She stumbled across the gnashing splinters, across the rubbish Beatrice had swept together in the hallway. "Mr. Charles Ballard's residence," she said breathlessly. All through the pandemonium of these days such idiotic eggshell bits of conventions kept sticking to her well-bred back.

"Hello—this is Mousie speaking. What's the matter? Why didn't you people come back with Jake Watts? He says he couldn't wait any longer, or his boat would have sunk, it got so overloaded, but—wait a moment, he wants to talk to Florian——"

"To Flori? What in the world——" Angelina tried to steady her voice and clear her raw, burning throat. "From where are you speaking? Tiburon Inn? Isn't Flori with you? No—no—he isn't here either—no, he never showed up. I—Mousie—what time did he leave Belvedere?"

"Went like a blue streak down to the harbour when the first tremor was hardly over. I can't understand——"

"Neither can I. You don't think—something happened—Mousie——"

Silence in the telephone.

"Let's hope not. Let's pray and hope that nothing happened. Listen, Angelina, you must look for him at once—make inquiries—Where? Damn you, woman, everywhere—at the Bohemian Club—that's where he has his friends—or—some hospital—what do I know—there must be some casualty lists—What? Jake says to drive out to the Mechanics' Pavilion, there's a first-aid station—Angelina? Are you still there? Why don't you say anything?"

Angelina shrugged, helpless before Mousie's ignorance. "You don't know what you're talking about, you can't imagine how it looks in town. Drive out to the Pavilion? Oh, my God, Mousie, it's burning, no one knows how many thousand people were trapped there. Why don't you come over and search for Flori yourself? I can't—I have to stay with little Joy. I promised Maud——"

"And I promised Florian to watch his violin, I vouched with my life for her safety—besides, no one is permitted to enter San Francisco any more——"

Another tremor, another explosion, closer than the ones before. The receiver dropped from Angelina's hand, swinging, bumping rhythmically against the wall, with Mousie's voice still sputtering, croaking, coughing in it, and then the telephone went dead. Angelina took a few steps and looked around in a daze. The entrance hall was dark and yet not quite dark. A restless orange gleam was sweeping through the house that had been home but was home no longer; it brushed over the surface of familiar things become unfamiliar, everything changed, broken, moved from its place, in ghastly transformation.

What now? she thought. What now? She went to the front door which the earthquake had jarred on its hinges so that it did not lock any longer, and gasping for air, she stepped outside and numbly looked up and down the street. But there was only the same bitter suffocating heated smoke and people standing in uneasy groups in front of their houses, not speaking, not doing anything, just watching, waiting.

With the fall of night the wind had become stronger, it whirled rags of fire high into the air, carried them off, played with them, dropped them here and there, like discarded toys of hell. Wherever they fell, new crops of flames sprang up,

sprouting from gables and roofs, from all the turreted, crenelated, pillared, and carved gingerbread splendour of San Francisco. The narrow alleys became horizontal flues, feeding new oxygen to the flames, and in street after street people made themselves ready to flee with their best possessions—but not before the fire was reaching out for their block. Only then would they grab the baby and the canary bird, the oriental rug and the sewing machine, the Bible and the last two bottles of bourbon, and join the trudging mass of fugitives. . . .

Angelina stepped back into the house and mechanically tried to close the door that would not close. We can't stay here tonight, she thought, it's not safe, there will be drunks, criminals, looters, marauders, rapists; but no, she thought again, we must remain in this house. This is where Florian will look for us if he is alive. Even if he should be injured, this is where he will come. If. If he is alive.

If he is not alive, then—yes, Angelina, what then? Then I don't want to live either, she suddenly knew. It was a revelation, a sharp blinding lightning deep into her. I didn't know it, she thought, I didn't know he meant so much to me, and the tears began to sting and burn in her swollen eyes and to run bitingly down the parched skin of her face, down to her cracked lips where she licked them up. Salt. Everything one great pain and a world without Florian an inconceivable void, a dark pit, a bottomless emptiness. The walls began to revolve and the floor tilted up towards her and she began to smile. That's all the water that's left, she thought: tears. And then her knees gave and everything was blotted out.

She did not know how brief or long the merciful interim of her first genuine faint had been when Beatrice's hand, shaking her shoulder, woke her up. "Drink, Bambina," she said and a glass was held to her lips.

"Wine?" she asked, astonished. She felt better, her mind less fuzzy. "Where did you get it?"

"I found a demijohn in Lee Ong's room; and three oranges, the sneaking thief," Beatrice said. "It's cheap wine, only for cooking. I gave little Gioia orange juice. I regret that I had to wake you up, you were sleeping like a baby. But, Piccolina mia—now the house has caught fire," she said gently: she said it in Italian—and for many days to come she seemed to have forgotten every single word of English she ever knew.

"What's that? Caught fire? Don't be crazy—— Where? What——"

"The roof," Beatrice said, pointing upwards. "It started in the turret. We must get out at once. But don't lose your head. There is still time enough. I put your things together in your travel bag upstairs. You carry the bag, I carry the baby; she is too heavy for you, Poverina."

"Why didn't Johnny come to warn us? He promised to take care of me, the drunken sot," Angelina cried, getting wholesomely furious. With danger crackling and hissing overhead and a red glare pulsating in the shattered transom light of the front door, she rallied at great speed. She was upstairs and never knew how she got there. Yet she wasted a few precious moments inspecting the contents of the bag. Her jewel box, her chinchilla stole, the good green street dress, a change of linen, an extra pair of shoes. And what about my chinchilla muff? What about my new evening gown? What about the sealskin coat? Where is my reticule—my purse—my money? She tried to stuff the precious muff into the bag but had to give up. I'll have to carry it. She pinned on a hat because even in the midst of cataclysm it seemed unthinkable for a lady to be seen on the street without a hat; as an afterthought she did as Lee Ong had done. She piled another hat on top of the first, slipped on her sealskin coat, slid the muff high up on her arm, and lifted the bag. When she opened the door a murderous black pillow was pressed against her face, wanted to kill her. The landing was filled with smoke; no flames. Only the smoke and the heat, the staircase a roaring furnace. Angelina was dying then and there. "Beatrice——" she screamed. "Help me, Beatrice——"

"Down the back stairs—to the basement—quick," came Beatrice's voice from the hall.

Angelina backed into her room, coughing, choking; she tore the small rug from the floor. It was sickeningly, sweetly, soaked through with perfume from all the broken bottles. It was an old hooked rug of Grandma Ballard's making and as Angelina wrapped herself into it she felt a fleeting regret that it was too late to salvage the larger and more expensive Bokhara from the front parlour instead. She pulled it close over her face—if only my hair doesn't catch fire—it was like being inside a small tent, hot, suffocating, through the bathroom, down the corridor, the service stairs, down, still down, sliding, slipping, tumbling down into the basement, like a bundle of

dirty laundry down a chute: and there in the darkness was Beatrice, panting, but big and safe as a rock.

"Here—hold little Joy for me, Bambina; I must try something——"

"Is she all right, Beatrice?"

"Perfect. I took her down in the dumbwaiter, no smoke. Beatrice is clever, no?"

Joy was behaving beautifully, almost as though she understood the danger; she nestled up to Angelina, who held her on her lap, gulping the air that was not quite so hot down here, easier to breathe. "Hand me my shawl," Beatrice said from the total darkness farther back.

"Annelina, I want to take a nap," Joy said reasonably; "I am tired." In the crisis of the last minutes she had suddenly discovered who she was. She was little Joy. She was herself. Not any longer was she an impersonal "you" outside of herself but she had become an "I" like those huge creatures who sometimes lifted her up to their own height, who had faces, eyes, noses, funny ears just like she had and who washed and fed her and played with her and tucked her into bed. "I," she said, "I want to sleep." Baffled, Angelina stroked the little girl's cheeks, put her dry lips into the soft baby hair. "Bunny is tired, give Bunny a kiss," said Joy, pushing the fuzzy toy into Angelina's face.

"I'm tired too, honey, very tired. But now we're going to your daddy—and sleep—and sleep—and sleep." She heard Beatrice thump about, muttering, and there came a pleasant sound from the darkness, splashing, gurgling. "What on earth are you doing, Bea?"

"*Vu bene!* We can go. Out through the garden."

Beatrice had soaked her shawl in Lee Ong's stolen wine and was pouring the rest of the demijohn over Angelina's rug. She lifted the child from Angelina's lap and wrapped it carefully in the moist shawl. The wine was tepid, its sour smell a refreshing change from the day-long bitterness of smoke and fire. "*Avanti!*" commanded Beatrice, thumping up the steps to the back door. "I go ahead. You take little Gioia under your rug and stay close behind me. We must keep her between us. Be not afraid. It is easy. We will get through." She put the silent, tight little bundle in Angelina's arms and in a last moment of hesitation Angelina heard her pump herself full of air, like a blacksmith's bellows, and open the garden door.

These were the worst seconds of all. Out of the cool dark

shelter into the red-hot pack of snapping, yapping doglike flames on the ground; through a flurry of bright sparks and a rain of searing black flakes and ashes and flying scraps of fire and glowing pieces of timber which, dropping left and right with a softly decaying sound, started new flickering beds of small blue flames wherever they fell. Beatrice went ahead, her skirts thrown over her head, shielding Angelina and the child with her broad back. Her heavy legs stomped securely, evenly across the blanket of fire. "*Viene—viene—come on, come on, Bambina mia—va bene, va bene—*" she sang out and Angelina followed her, frightened and yet assured, as in her childhood she had followed Beatrice through all the perils of dark rooms and strange places and even into the mean cold waves of a wind-beaten shore. . . .

"*Eccolo!*" said Beatrice and stopped. "Here we are. Now we are safe." But for the smoke pressing up from Chinatown it might still have been daylight. Here and there a house on Clay Street had caught fire and a police cordon was turning the people's exodus towards Nob Hill. Up there, white and frozen against the churning black clouds, an assembly of beautiful ghosts, the marble statues of the Huntington Collection stood in indifferently expectant poses on the sidewalk. By now the conflagration was reaching out for the ginger-bread citadels of the royal dynasties of San Francisco, the Crockers, the Floods, the Stanfords, the Huntingtons. Nob Hill was escaping in automobiles, carriages, surreys, in old cabs, on bicycles and on foot, pressing on towards Van Ness Avenue and the safe zones beyond. Some of the wealthy fugitives were loaded down like camels in their efforts at saving their oriental rugs, their pianos, their questionable objets d'art, high-bosomed bronzes, silk hangings, family portraits by the hands of overpaid third-rate painters; all the dubious possessions that cluttered up their houses and their lives.

Beatrice had taken little Joy in her arms once more and was stoutly going against the current, with Angelina close behind the shield of her broad body. "Where are we going, Beatrice?"

"Telegraph Hill. To my relatives."

"Let's try to get to the ferry. You take Joy to the villa. I'll stay in the city. I must find Mr. Ambros."

"Good. If not the ferry, I have a cousin, he owns a small boat, he does not like me, but he likes money. Do we have money, Piccolina?"

In the poor quarters the fleeing people too carried all their

belongings with them. Chests and coffers, pulled by ropes over the broken-up, unpaved lanes, were grinding and groaning. Shabby furniture, lumpy mattresses, pots and pans; on wheelbarrows, handcarts, in baby carriages, on the backs of thin young boys and crooked old ladies. Salvaged treasures: the sewing machine, the upright piano, the picture of the Madonna Sistina, a melodion carried from a trattoria and put down at the next corner. Music, yes, even now there was music on Telegraph Hill, a man with a smoke-blackened mask for a face was thumping out "Santa Lucia," a few others began singing. An old woman beating her chest, shrieking, shrieking louder than all the explosions. A goat, dead at the wayside. A neat little man with a bowler hat and spectacles carrying a pregnant young woman piggyback. Drunken civilians, drunken soldiers, drunken wenches. A dazed little boy with a limp dead rabbit in his arms; tears had etched a pale pattern into his smudged face. Another nickelodeon, fresh, brash; a scrap of brassy sin rescued from a bawdy house, together with five dishevelled, buxom, frightened, but gallantly impudent girls. A cat lugging in her mouth her kittens, one after the other, across the street—and the people stop to let her pass, they smile, they call: "Pussy cat, here, pussy cat, here!" And always, everywhere, like a permanent backdrop on a fantastic stage, the fire, the flames, the smoke, the noise of doom.

They were stopped by another police cordon. "Turn back! No one can get through here. There are no more ferryboats. Get going or you'll be blasted to kingdom come. Closed area. Turn around. To the park, to the Presidio. General Funston's orders: tents and camping ground will be provided for everybody."

The crowd was turning round and trudging back the way it had come, obediently, almost hopefully, glad to receive a command and a direction. Most of them were too tired, too dazed, to act on their own. Somewhere in front they were singing again.

Angelina was swept along in the streaming humanity, in it, but not quite of it. It became more and more of a nightmare that she, Angelina Ballard, Mrs. Clyde Hopper, who only last night had been the best-dressed lady at the opera, was now a miserable fugitive amidst other miserable fugitives—she, who had danced three waltzes with an archduke. She was aching from head to toe, her eyes swollen, her feet blistered, her arms ready to fall from their sockets with the weight of the bag

which she changed incessantly from one side to the other; her shoulders sagging under the fur coat, her head throbbing under the two hats, her throat sore, her tongue thick; and her mind a void shot through with flashes of resentment against everything and everybody. At intervals something almost forgotten knifed into her: Florian. Florian was missing. It was just like Florian to get lost on the way from the Ferry Building to Clay Street. He always forgot to wear a hat. But these thoughts came and went in a haze and were drowned in exhaustion; only the aches of her body remained. Thank God, she had been able to save the baby. She had risked her own life to keep her promise to Maud. No one would ever know what she had gone through to save the child of this loathsome sister of hers who had stolen from her the only man she loved. . . .

"Why is little Joy so quiet, Beatrice? She isn't ill, is she?"

"No no no. She's asleep, my poor little princess, she was tired out. You are tired too, Bambina mia. Come, sit down and rest a minute."

"I'll never make it as far as the park. I'm not strong enough. I'll drop dead if I take another step. Why did Father have to take the Pierce-Arrow to the ranch? He is so selfish, Beatrice; all men are selfish brutes——"

"Possibly—but they have their nice sides too," said Beatrice. On her broad swarthy face was still the afterglow of a moonlit night in Aurelio's arms some twenty-seven years ago. . . .

Mr. Jacob Frankel, on his way home after having done his turn with the Citizens' Guard, discovered Angelina, resting on a pillar that had dropped from a mansion on Hyde Street; she had taken off her shoes and bedded her head in her arms, a pitifully small and exhausted statue. Mr. Frankel scooped her up and almost carried her to his more or less undamaged home on O'Farrell Street.

"You take the bag, Beatrice, and let me carry little Joy," Angelina said with the last residue of her usual presence of mind. And thus, with the sleeping little girl cradled in her arms, she made her entrance into the Frankels' parlour.

"My dear, this Mrs. Hopper is a wonderful woman, you know her, the younger of the two Ballard daughters, we were in Vienna together and believe me, if she had only moved her little finger she could have married an archduke. If you had only seen her the day she rescued her sister's baby during the Fire—I'll never forget how she stood on our threshold, so

small and lovely, like an angel; she had wrapped the baby in a shawl which she had soaked in wine, clever, wasn't it? Their house on Clay Street burned down over her head and she carried that baby straight through a sheet of flames, and, imagine, she hadn't even forgotten to take the baby's favourite toy along, sort of a bunny with one eye missing. 'Hello, Annie—what in the world——' I said and 'Hello, Mrs. Frankel,' she said ever so gently with that English accent she brought from Hawaii. 'Really, I'm frightfully sorry to impose upon you——' and with that she dropped to the floor as if dead. A wonderful woman! I put her in my bed with the baby and the bunny. I didn't mind a bit sleeping on the floor with the others, you know we had taken in fifty-four people that night, it sure was a holy mess, we had them packed like sardines upstairs and downstairs and we tore down every curtain and drapery and portière and used them for blankets; I remember, my Coby pledged a thousand dollars to the synagogue out of gratitude that our house hadn't been damaged. Well—and the next day they came and dynamited it—puff!—and the Frankels had to move into a tent at the North Bay——"

Thus Mrs. Frankel. Thus the legend was born.

The second morning of the disaster rose through smoke and stench, the fire was steadily advancing, and if it could not be brought to a standstill at Van Ness Avenue, all of San Francisco was doomed. The churches were crowded and the men of God preached what they had preached all along: that the Lord was punishing the wicked place as he had punished Sodom and Gomorrah and that nothing would be left of San Francisco but a sulphurous desert. People went out to hunt for food, stand in one of the swiftly forming bread lines, scan the first extra papers still wet from the Oakland printshops and teeming with heedless misprints. "CATACLSM!" the headline shouted above the valiant though misinformed and exaggerated reports. Street after street was blasted as officers of the dynamiting crews went from house to house and politely requested the owners to clear out. Another exodus, another trek, two hundred thousand, three hundred thousand homeless San Franciscans went camping on the shores and in the hills around their burning city. They were a sturdy race, these people of San Francisco. Guilty of gluttony, intemperance,

iniquity, and fornication during good times, but strong and stouthearted when things went against them. Their parents had come from every corner of the earth, in the steerages of ships from Europe, Asia, Africa, on Clippers around the Cape, in covered wagons across the plains and mountain passes. They had come with nothing but their bare hands and their strong backs, their drive to make a life for themselves, and their willingness to work the mines, the orchards, the fields. Adventurers, fighters, gamblers, loose women, yet they had made a beautiful city grow from the sandy, wind-swept dunes; a luxurious, brilliant city, homes, mansions, skyscrapers, churches; parks and museums and monuments and fountains; they had brought the straight streets and squares from their plains and flung them foolhardily up and down the crazy steepness of the hills, these stout early settlers of San Francisco. Now, in the midst of disaster, their children and grandchildren, softened by too much easy living as they were, remembered their heritage. Their city was doomed. But even before it was gone there was talk of a newer, a better, a still more beautiful one to be built defiantly on the same spot, right in the face of the catastrophe. Whatever the men of God might have to say about the corruption and pollution and wickedness of the people, there were certainly more than the Ten Righteous Men for whose sake the Lord had offered once upon a time to spare Sodom and Gomorrah. There were people who joked to make others laugh and people who sang or played a march on the salvaged accordion to ease the long trek. There were people to help carry burdens too heavy for others, support the old ones, assist the women whom the shock had rushed into precipitate childbirth at the wayside. People who shared their bread, their salami, their precious canteen of water with the unknown neighbour, people who opened their houses to any and all in need of shelter.

Once again Angelina was numbly drifting along among the others. It was a warm day, she had a grave problem: should she try to drag that sealskin coat of hers on and on, God alone knew how many more miles? Or should she throw it away right then and there? It was insured against theft and loss, but would the company pay under the circumstances? Indeed, would she ever get another fur coat, or were they poor people now? As for Hopper—and she had to haul her husband from the deepest recess of her memory, so far had she left him behind—you could not rely on him. Star sapphires,

yes, but if he kept on drinking and gambling there would soon be no money for coats—chinchilla, sealskin, or otherwise. Of course there was still Florian, he owed her more than he could repay in a lifetime of gratitude; she had rescued his child. With my own body I covered your little daughter against the flames, I carried her from the burning house—and once more she had forgotten that Florian was missing, perhaps dead. . . .

Somehow she had lost sight of the Frankels in the crush and concourse and found herself inexplicably mixed in with a bunch of excitable jabbering Italians, a fighting, singing, laughing, oil-cooking, uncouth cluster of foreigners. Probably they had admitted the three of them into their overcrowded tent solely for Beatrice's sake. Beatrice seemed highly pleased with the arrangement, and little Joy, roundly kissed and blessed and played with, dandled on grassy knees and fed a dubious mess of ravioli, appeared to enjoy the noise and squalor of the camp.

"Probably she will catch lice if not something worse," Angelina said bitterly to Johnny O'Shaughnessy. "For mercy's sake, Johnny, get us out of here, get us away, this is unbearable." But Johnny only shrugged; he was a very important person by now, was Johnny O'Shaughnessy. He had arrived in one of the automobiles City Hall had requisitioned and went around posting up strict new orders: Boil all water, burn all swill.

To Angelina he had seemed like a heavenly apparition and she had rushed up to him and thrown her arms around his neck: "Johnny, oh, Johnny dear, you're the only real friend I ever had, you'll help me, you'll take me away from here——"

But Johnny acted pompous and unkind and she let go of his useless neck. "This is not the time for acting snobbish, my girl; cheer up and thank the Lord that you're alive, and the little tot too. Think of other people who're much worse off than you."

"Other people aren't alone——" she said pitifully.

"Well, sweetheart, if you are it's your own fault. Where's that lovely dreamer, that brother-in-law of yours? Why isn't Mr. Ambros taking care of you and his baby?"

"He's been missing since yesterday morning. I don't know whether he's still alive. I try not to think of it, or I'll go crazy," Angelina said. It sounded flat, and even as she said it, it did not seem true.

Johnny was silent for a moment. "I'm sorry, Annie," he said, putting his fist under her chin and tilting up her head to see if she were crying. She was not and he felt sorrier yet. "I'll tell you something, sweetheart, why don't you go to Belvedere? Your family have a summer shack there, haven't they? It's the logical place where Mr. Ambros and your father and everybody else would expect to find you. In Marin County you're out of harm's way; here we're all in the hand o' the Lord and we don't know if any of us will still be alive tomorrow."

The pious, oily tone was something new with Johnny and anger boiled up in Ann. "Thanks for the advice; if I knew how to get us to Belvedere, do you think I'd spend another minute in this pigsty? I wish you'd stop preaching and do something, for heaven's sake, do something!"

"All right. I'll give you a first-class tip, Annie, and I wouldn't do it for anyone else. I have it on good authority that a government boat is going to take some choice people across the bay to Marin County. From Fort Mason. This afternoon, around five or after. I'm sure they'll take you aboard if you tell them you're old man Ballard's daughter. Now, do I deserve a teeny-weeny kiss for this?"

"Fort Mason?" Angelina asked; she was perking up, but wilting, drooping, shrinking the next moment. "I'll never make it. I'm so tired, so tired, Johnny, I've walked a thousand miles since yesterday; look at my feet—I wish I weren't such a weak, useless creature but, Johnny, I'll break down on the way, I know it——"

Johnny looked at her feet; they were bare, ridiculously small and very dirty, with open blisters on heels and toes. "Okay, my lassie," he said, "get your bundles and hop into my automobile. I can't take you all the way to Fort Mason, but I'll let you ride with me to the edge of the camp."

"Oh, Johnny, you're wonderful!" Angelina cried. It was her ever-recurring cry through the years she had known helpful Johnny; and, washing her face in a cloudburst of tears, she paid him his usual toll.

It was a peculiarity of O'Shaughnessy's hot tips that they were never quite right although they were seldom completely wrong; a peculiarity that was to accompany him through all stations of his rise from a hotheaded city councillor to a grey-haired but still rash United States senator, and that made him veto most of those bills which proved beneficial in the long

run, and, on the other hand, support causes, men, and movements which did a considerable deal of harm. A popular and successful national figure, he remained a staunch friend of the Ballards, always ready to give them advice and generously let them share his secret information. Thus it was on John O'Shaughnessy's hot tips that Mr. Ballard in 1910 put the greater part of his resources into a real estate project that unexpectedly burst like a stink-bomb and more or less finished the old man. Again, it was O'Shaughnessy who helped Angelina invest her money in the bull market of 1928, with results which neither the senator nor his ebullient friends could have foreseen. . . .

And so, when Angelina on this afternoon of 19th April 1906, arrived at Fort Mason, footsore and completely worn out, she learned that she had spent her last ounce of energy chasing a mirage. There had, indeed, been a government boat; but it had left early that morning for Oakland, and would not have admitted civilians in any case.

"That's the end. That's the end, Beatrice," she said. "I give up. You go on, you do what you want. You're strong, I am not, I can't any more." She put down the bag which she had been dragging along, endlessly, as heavy as though every star sapphire had been a cobblestone. She let herself drop on to a seat of some sort, an upturned old garbage can, ironically, as on the day she had eaten lobster to get herself the scarlet fever. Beatrice stood over her, a grimy monument, trying to measure the amount of strength still left in her bambina.

"You will not go back to the Salvarinis' tent then?" Angelina shook her head. "What else? Sleep in the open? Under a tree?" But Angelina only shrugged. "If I leave you, can you stay alone?"

"I don't care. I don't care what you do and what happens, I don't care if the whole city burns down with me and you and everybody. I give up," Angelina said.

Beatrice meditated for a long minute. The fog was closing in, obliterating shore and foothills and the countless people that had, termitelike, invaded them. "*Bene*, Angelina, I go now, I find my cousin Adriano, but I need money, I talk to him, I show him money. He will row us over and if not he, another of the men at the Wharf. It is not too far to walk for big feet like mine. But I cannot take little Gioia with me. I leave her here with you. Rest now, but do not fall

asleep, no? And do not move from here, until I come back."

Angelina kicked off her torn shoes and showed her bloody little feet. "Move? I? Where to?" she asked with a heart-breaking smile—even in her numbed state she could feel that it was heartbreaking. Beatrice put little Joy on her lap.

"You take good care of each other, my two little girls," she said and then the fog swallowed her up.

The warmth of the slowly relaxing small body seeped into Angelina's and Joy fell asleep. The fog was closing around them, thicker and tighter; it was so quiet you could hear the water lap against the mole far out. If you paid attention to it you could also hear the roaring, hissing, booming, distant voice of the city burning away under its own red sky. Angelina was getting sleepy, too, and the sound of the little waves washing against the shore made her thirsty. But she had to stay awake, watch the bag at her side, the star sapphires, the chinchilla stole. Funny, how little you cared for such things when you were tired and there was no bed; thirsty and there was no water. No water, except the whole Pacific Ocean, that is. "There are real values and purely symbolic values," Florian had remarked in one of his deep and rather boring discussions with Mousie. Angelina hadn't quite understood what he meant, but she understood it now. Star sapphires were a symbolic value if a drink of water was what you needed. Even money was only a symbol if you couldn't buy anything with it. She experienced another earthquake then and there, it shook the foundations of her world, because if money was not real, what was? But the shock lasted only a fraction of a second. Money could get you a rowboat to take you to safety—provided Beatrice was lucky and did not get lost like Florian. Angelina folded her hands over the sleeping child and began to pray, and although her prayer came out a trifle petulantly—Dear Lord, protect and save us, and, listen, You can't let anything happen to Florian, I need him so—it made her feel better. Oh, much better, really.

"Man alive, so this is where you're caroming around, while your sister-in-law is worrying her eyes out of her head? Don't you think you ought to look after your little tot and not leave everything to poor Annie?" John O'Shaughnessy told Florian Ambros when he discovered him in the Oldsmobile in which the reporters of the *Call* were circling the ever-growing peri-

phery of the fire. They had stopped for more news at the temporary headquarters City Hall had established and were on their way to the special launch that was to take their copy to Oakland, since every printshop in San Francisco had turned into a mass of molten lead.

"What else do you think I've been doing since yesterday but trying to find them?" Ambros said heatedly. "*Hergott noch einmal*, I don't need you to tell me what to do! Forgive me, O'Shaughnessy," he added with more self-control. "You're the first person to tell me that they are safe—they are, yes?—and instead of kissing your hand I bark at you. But it is enough to drive a man insane—it's so incredible! One might run around in circles for days, for weeks, and not be able to find one's own child!"

"That's true, Mr. Ambros. Annie was searching for you as much as you for her. But we're all in the same boat, see? I don't like to talk about myself, but here I am very close to the mayor, very close, and still I can't find out where my own old man might be. My old lady is growing corns on her knees from praying day and night in St. Mary's——"

"I'll help her pray. I'll help you find your father, if you would tell me where they are, Mrs. Hopper and my child——"

"Well, Mr. Ambros, I'll give you a tip: if you get there fast enough, you'll catch her at Fort Mason, she's trying to get on the government boat that's supposed to leave around five. I advised her to sit this one out in Belvedere."

Ambros looked at the faces of his friends, the reporters; tired, dishevelled, inflamed eyes, soot and grime and stubble, the faces of the gallant, grim, cynical, softhearted desperadoes whose business it was to hunt up peril, horror, and adequate adjectives, break catastrophe into little words to feed them to the hungry maws of the printing presses. "Would you boys have a heart and take me to Fort Mason?"

"We would but it wouldn't do you any good," one of them said, an asthmatic, slightly drunken man with the looks of a great old lion made into a rug. "O'Shaughnessy talks rubbish, there is no more boat sailing from the fort. You want to get to Marin side? Then your best bet is our launch; if you bribe us adequately we might stow you away on it. Say, Johnny, you there, is Lower Market Street cleared for traffic by now?"

"You'll have to ask someone whose information you trust more than mine. I have it on good authority——" O'Shaughnessy grumbled with bruised feelings, as the Oldsmobile went

sputtering on its way. "This fellow Ambros didn't look too good either; had a little dent on his forehead, where did he get it?" he asked the cub reporter the *Call* crew had left behind.

"It's just one of those little human-interest stories, not much to it, except that Ambros is one celebrity that wasn't running around on Union Square in his nightie. Seems something conked him on the head right after he came out of the Ferry Building yesterday morning—well, you know how it looked down there. He was out like a light and some friendly souls picked him up and carried him into Gloria's house, you know it? Ritzy place, good clean girls, I have this part of the story from one of them, Barbara, you know her? The buxom blonde girl, comes from Texas; well, anyway, when the Tenderloin began to burn, they had to clear out, but fast, and there they were saddled with Mr. Ambros, out like a stick, and not even a regular customer at that. So those darling girls handed him to some good Samaritans who were scooping up casualties and dumped them in that little private hospital on Sutter Street. Naturally, the doctors were too busy to bother with such a quiet, painless parcel, probably they figured if his skull was fractured he'd die without their assistance and if it wasn't he'd come around, anyway. So he came around, groggy, with a roaring headache and a sick stomach. I guess he had a little concussion, because when we picked him up last night he was still throwing up at regular intervals like a pregnant she-whale. By the time he came to, the place had to be cleared for dynamiting, and the first thing he remembers is that he was helping to carry stretchers. He must have been out for hours, because when he finally stumbled up to Clay Street, the Ballard home had burned down to the ground. Then his real trouble started. No one knew whether his little girl was alive or dead, and he just kept running around asking people had they seen or heard anything about his kid, and that's when we picked him up; at last we found out from a certain Mr. Gallagher that, yes, everything was in the best of order and they had got away, his wife's sister and his little girl and some old servant. So then he figured in his fumbling brain that they would have gone someplace in Marin County and off he went. I don't know how he got himself across the bay and back, but this morning he was on this side again. Somehow he picked up a rumour that they were with some people on O'Farrell Street, but when he got there—pop goes the weasel

—the house had been blasted off the map. I don't know what he did then, I guess he was just wandering the streets and out to the park and God knows where else. Next time we saw him he had been pressed into a gang digging graves, or maybe he had volunteered, so we took him along and just watched him going to pieces by and by, but quiet-like, gentleman-like, if you know what I mean. Gave a hand wherever it was necessary, not afraid to wade into the worst spots with us, didn't complain either, just that look in his eyes as if he were going blind—well, bless his heart, by now he'll soon be across the bay and with his little girl. Good for him—but makes a flat ending for a human-interest story, or what do you think, Johnny?"

"Can you tell me why old man Ballard would give any of his girls to a fellow who doesn't know the first thing about practical life?" was all Johnny had to comment.

Shortly after seven o'clock Florian Ambros came into the parlour of the Tiburon Inn. "Good evening, George, is your father at home?" he asked the boy who was sitting on the hearthrug with his arm around the neck of a huge dog of some St. Bernard ancestry; both boy and dog were staring into the fireplace. George had brought in the logs when the fog began drifting in and the evening grew chilly. "Yes, Mr. Ambros, Father is upstairs, shall I call him?" he said.

"Oh, hello, Randy, I thought I heard your voice," Jake Watts said, stepping out on the gallery above and quickly coming downstairs. He did not dare ask anything but waited for Florian to speak.

"It's all right, Jake, they are all right, all three of them," Florian said, "I am almost certain they are. It's only—it took me several eternities to transport myself all the way to Belvedere via Oakland and somehow I was absolutely convinced I would find them at the villa by the time I reached home. But they aren't there. You didn't hear anything either, did you? No message? Nothing? And there is no more ferry coming from the city? No, I suppose not. Do you know anything about a government boat shipping people over from Fort Mason? Don't mind if I stay out on the jetty, I get too restless indoors. And listen—could George ride up to the villa on his bicycle and tell Mousie not to worry about me, and not

to sit up for me, tell her I might stay here till rather late——”

“Sure, Mr. Ambros, I’m going right now,” said George.

Florian lit another cigarette and began pacing the jetty Thirty-two steps towards the water, thirty-two steps back towards the inn. Thirty-two steps with moist drift of wind into his face, thirty-two steps with its damp hand pressing against his back. A foghorn warning somewhere out in the bay, another one answering. In the little harbour the fishing boats were gently swaying, seagulls were asleep, white blobs on the slate-blue water, visible now and then, and again blotted out by fog. He threw his cigarette butt over the railing and heard the tiny hiss as it struck the water. His ears were sharpened to an unbelievable degree, all his senses heightened, everything transformed as things are sometimes in dreams, in a high fever, in the visions of the drunk. After a long while he went up a few steps and sat down where he thought to have a better view. The widow’s walk, he thought with a self-deprecating little snort and he also thought of everything that could have happened to Joy and Angelina since O’Shaughnessy had seen them last. Another cigarette and another one and another one. He hardly knew what he was still waiting for, and then, after an immeasurable time he heard a new sound, different from the somnolent creaking and chafing of the moored boats. Slap-slap. Slap-slap. Slap-slap. Oars hitting the water, the small rat-squeak of a badly oiled oarlock. A tiny light moving through the fog. Florian got up, trying to keep his heart down in his chest. The light disappeared from his view as the boat approached the jetty, but he heard the chain being fastened to the posts and perceived the movements of a bulky shape at the end of the jetty, and then the light, a small lantern, was held high to show the way for someone being helped from the rowboat. For a moment Florian stood stiffly, unable to breathe, and then an iron ring around his chest broke and he rushed forward. Angelina was bending down to the boat to take the child from Beatrice and carry it in her arms; the little lantern wove a pale halo around her in the fog.

That was how Florian saw her and that was what he could never forget. Not that she let him forget it, ever——

It was a funny moment, Angelina often thought in later years. He had a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and he threw it away and carefully crushed the spark with his heel before he took the child from her; and he did not say a word. He put his forehead into little Joy’s hair and perhaps he was

crying, but of this Angelina was not certain. Suddenly, still clutching the child to himself, he tried to peel off his old velvet jacket that was crusted with ashes and dust and a bit of blood and much sweat. "Angelina—you mustn't catch cold—darling, darling——" he said, fumbling to wrap the jacket around her. It was such a ridiculous gesture, it made her want to laugh and weep.

"Don't be such a fool, Flori, I don't catch cold—look, I have my chinchilla stole—no, don't look at me—I must be a sight——"

"You are—I can't tell you—oh, my God, darling, darling, you don't know—you don't know——"

"I know, Flori. If something had happened to you, I would not have wanted to stay alive either——"

It sounded like one of the things you told a man to make him feel good, but it was the truth. With every last drop of strength running out of her, she let herself fall against his chest. Like a well-trained chorus member in an opera, Beatrice moved forward to take the child from him and he closed his arms around Angelina. Little Joy opened her eyes for a moment, and smiled, and contentedly said: "Daddy? Angelina?" and was asleep again.

The third morning of the Fire dawned. San Francisco was still burning, streets were still being dynamited, the danger was not over yet; but in Marin County it was peaceful and quiet as though on a different planet. The sun rose over the cone of Belvedere and in the mountain ash which Grandma Ballard had planted many years ago a blue jay was quarrelling with his wife. Angelina woke up but Florian was still asleep, and she began to study every line of that sleeping face on the ruffled pillow, the dear, strong, exhausted face, the clean profile turned away from her, the long muscle between his neck and his shoulder where he would rest his violin and which she had kissed and which was now hers. I always get what I want, she thought, the floating enchantment of the night giving way to sober triumph. Her glance seemed to pierce into Florian's dreams, he stirred and opened his green eyes, turned around and stared at her.

"Oh—it's you," he said a moment later. "Good morning, Fairest of Them All."

"You know what I found? You have some grey hairs on your left temple. Five grey hairs. I counted them."

"Well? And does that surprise you? I grew them in the last two days. *Grosser Gott*, and I'm not shaved. Shame on you, Angelina, you oughtn't to be in bed with a fellow who doesn't seem to be a gentleman."

"Florian—wouldn't it have been a pity if we had died before last night? Think what we would have missed."

He grabbed for his golden cigarette-case on the night table. "Mind if I smoke?"

Father smoked cigars. Hopper had a pipe. Pipes were disgusting, little piles of ashes, dirty pipe-cleaners all over the house. Persian Miracle Oil. Dr. Birinski's Magneto-Electric Wonder Belt. But why think of Hopper now? "Florian, I love you so," she whispered. "Now you belong to me, I'll never let you go, I'll never be alone from now on, never——"

And then the doorknob turned, the door opened slowly, and on the threshold stood little Joy.

PART THREE

JOY AMBROS was sitting in the small lunch-and-waiting room of the anonymous little station where the train had stopped only long enough to report the accident to a sleepy stationmaster and leave the three of them behind: herself, George Watts, who had gruffly taken charge of the proceedings, and Major Ryerson, who, for no visible reason at all, seemed to have made up his mind to see things through with them. She was sitting there, waiting, staring into the palms of her hands. On the heel of the right one were four small blue-black marks left by Mother's teeth.

"What's that on your hand, kiddo? You're bleeding, did you hurt yourself?" the old army nurse on the train had asked.

"That? Oh! I must have bitten my thumb in the excitement. A bad habit of mine—whenever my nerves are upset——"

Small sting of iodine in the wound, glitter of a syringe in the nurse's hand. "No, no, I don't want to sleep, I can't sleep!" Joy had cried, fighting off the approaching instrument. "Please, don't make me sleep, Nurse. I have to stay awake, I shall have to get off at the next station, I'll have to lead the search party to the spot where it happened, I must be there when they—when they—find her——"

"Okay, okay, kiddo, don't fuss, don't fidget, here, take this pill, it'll steady your nerves," the nurse had told her, slightly ruffled. "Shock," Joy heard her report to the two men waiting at the door of the compartment. "Nature's sedative—it's better for her anyway——" and she had spit out the phenobarbital as soon as the nurse had turned her back. I mustn't let my mind get numb, I must keep a cool head, I must hold myself together. It seemed a singularly appropriate expression. One part of her was exceedingly bright and clear, a glass

tower with a watchful searchlight turned upon herself; the other part a dim, paralysed numbness, and it was almost impossible to keep these two parts of her together and make a whole of them. She got up and began to wander along the walls of the lunchroom.

"What's the name of the station?" she asked the station-master. He was a little man with spectacles and late-night stubble whom the extraordinary occurrence had sprung from somnolence into a high and curious agitation.

"This? It's Tokema—not much of a place, but quite nice in daytime; say, lady, if you'd like to wait in my office and turn on the radio until your husband comes back—oh, pardon me, I thought the major was your husband," he added hastily as he met Joy's uncomprehending glance.

"No, thanks, don't bother about me. I'm fine, thank you so much," Joy was repeating for the sixth time to the station-master's well-meant offers of entertainment. Watts and Ryerson had decided to walk into the sleeping little town to speed up the organizing of the search party; but time itself was oddly split and ambiguous, passing at once intolerably slowly and yet terrifyingly swiftly. The stationmaster withdrew tactfully into his cubicle from where she felt his watchful and sympathetic glances following her like annoying buzz flies. After a few minutes she left the small lunch-and-waiting room with its stale smells and sights—the spittoons, the unused coal stove, the sleeping coffee urn, the stolid Coca-Cola container, the obsolete-looking beer posters, the flyspecked time-tables on the walls. Under the overhanging roof of the platform she sat down on a bench. It was cold out here, the air was moist, pleasant with the scent of rain-soaked dust. A fuzzy yellow young dog came to sniff and, taking an instant and strong liking to her, he resolved to keep her company; yawning widely, he talked to her in the compelling code of his wagging tail and his beseeching eyes. Joy was grateful for his mute presence and his permission to warm her hands in his pelt. Now I'm coming out from under, she thought; it was like the setting in of pains when the anaesthetic begins to wear off after an operation. You became aware of your agony, not abruptly and all at once but in patches; consciousness spreading out like a scarlet liquid spilled on a flat white surface, here, there, spreading out and running together, and at last being everywhere and covering everything. I killed Mother. I killed her. It was a biting, burning, bleeding, excruciating

thought and pain. Mother once saved my life and in return for it I killed her. She did save my life, that much is true, she carried me out of the burning house, I was only three years old but I still remember it——

Joy had never been able to disentangle her own memories of the Fire from the rambling thicket of tales that had overgrown and transformed them. Only two things she recalled definitely and with great clarity: her bunny, which someone had taken away from her amidst a great wild noise and which had miraculously returned and gone to sleep with her. She remembered Bunny because he had remained her friend and bed companion until she was a big girl of eight, at which time her parents gave her that wonderful little baby brother for a present and she stopped caring for any and all toys.

The other thing she could remember was Beatrice's black shawl. She remembered Beatrice too, but not as well as she remembered that shawl in all its details: not really black but faded to an uncertain brown tempered by time and much use; closing her eyes, she saw it so sharply that she could have painted it, a big square of wool folded to form a triangle with ragged fringes and a large, tightly stitched patch of mending in one corner. The smell of that shawl, sheep, onion, oil, warm body, cold incense, church: Italy. And then that other unforgettable smell: wine, she had been told. She remembered how that soaked drunkard of a shawl had been wrapped around her and that it had made her feel gay and hazy and very good; but all the rest was not memory but a legend and a ballad and an often-repeated recital: "... and there I had you in my arms and the burning beams were crashing down left and right, I had to step through the flames and you looked at them with your big baby eyes and I just knew that I had to get you through unharmed. I still don't know how I did it, a frightened little mouse like me—but I did. There are untapped sources of strength even in the weakest creature if you love someone as I loved you, my little Joy——"

It must have been the morning after their rescue when Joy awakened in a strange room where not a single wall stood in the place where it belonged. This frightened her very much because it had something to do with the bogeyman who would come and get you, or perhaps she was a stolen child like the one Beatrice had talked about in the kitchen or, worse yet, she had been thrown away, and the wolves would come and eat her. The bed was immense, probably the bed of some

fairy-tale giant, and around it a fence of chairs had been built to keep her from falling out. Beyond the chairs Beatrice was snoring, a wonderfully familiar and consoling sound. Beatrice was asleep on the floor; she was covered with the black shawl and her mouth was wide open, also black inside, and full of puffing little noises. Next Joy discovered a fairy-tale bird, completely blue, on a branch outside of the window; it was a bird that could talk, he said "Joy" to her, "Joy! Joy!" and she decided at once to catch him. She crawled across the chairs and tried to awaken Beatrice, poking her fingers into the wrinkled dark eyelids, but Beatrice would not open her eyes. Joy, feeling fine at that point, went on exploring and after she had with great effort opened the door, she heard her father softly laugh and speak to someone behind another door across the corridor. Suddenly this was Sunday morning when one was permitted to crawl into Father's and Mummie's bed for a delightful period of roughhousing.

"Mummie!" she called. "Where are you, Mummie?" and stretching as high as she could, she turned the door-knob and opened the door. The room was a bit dark but she could see Father sitting up in bed and he was smoking a cigarette as usual. And then Joy saw that it was not Mummie who was lying in bed with him but Annelina; she was pulling the blanket high up over her face as if to play hide-and-seek but her blonde curled hair stuck out on top. Joy stopped on the threshold because Father seemed very angry, angrier than she had ever seen him, and in no mood for playing.

"What do you want? How did you get in here?" he shouted hoarsely.

"I want my mummie——" Joy stammered, incapable of expressing a very great number of very complicated things; if her three years could have talked, this was what she should have wanted to say: I thought my mummie was here and I was happy about it because she has been away so long, and I didn't want to make you angry, I only wanted to play in your bed as we always did before Mummie left us. And why doesn't Annelina sleep in her own bed? She is grown up and even I have to sleep alone and not make a fuss about it——

"There is a bird——" she said at last with quivering lips.

Father was not mad any longer, he looked the way he did when she had hurt herself and was feeling sorry for her. "It's all right, Joy," he said softly, "now be a good little girl and go back to your room. We'll look at the bird later, it's very

early yet and we're all very, very tired. Come, shall Daddy carry you back to your bed? There, there—now close your eyes and go to sleep again——”

Later Annelina explained to her that she had only dreamed all of this, including the blue bird that could speak, and, indeed, Joy never saw or heard that bird again. She knew, though, that she had not dreamed, but with the strange, mute secretiveness of childhood she sensed that there was something one wasn't to talk about. She built a tight little wall around it, encasing one of the many hidden vaults wherein she buried secret after secret, particle after particle of herself, during the peripatetic years of her growing up.

About that morning she had never spoken to anyone, not even to Dr. Behrman, the eminent psychologist, although he had been the one to dig up this illuminating scrap of memory that helped her to understand the rest of the pattern. There had been a certain period in her life when she had needed a few sessions with Dr. Behrman and he had scratched and dug away in the subsoil of her mind like an eager and proud dog, until he had at last unearthed a few buried bones: early impressions, things heard, seen, sensed, but not comprehended; fragments, memories, little odds and ends which she had only much later pieced together into a semblance of continuity.

Waiting on a hard bench under the dripping eaves of a forsaken little station in the midst of nowhere—waiting for the people to come and assist in the search for the body of her stepmother whom she had killed—Joy Ambros thought of Dr. Behrman; his wise, sad monkey face, the scrabbling noise of his nails scratching his bristly little moustache; a bad etching of Mont St. Michel on which she fastened her eyes during confessions, and the hushed, slightly sticky, slightly ridiculous atmosphere of mental midwifery—but perhaps I should have taken his advice and had myself psychoanalysed; perhaps he could have unlocked a few doors for me and set me free and then, perhaps, I wouldn't have done what I did and this incredible night would never have come to pass. But now it is too late. It's done and I have to face the consequences.

Restlessly she moved her shoulders, to feel the softer lining of her coat rubbing against the tweed of her jacket, to keep in touch with the slippery, evasive reality of the hour. But on four thousand dollars a year you can't afford to pamper yourself with psychoanalysis, she told herself. Besides, who knows?

Perhaps Dr. Behrman would only have taken me apart and never been able to put me together again. That's the main thing now: hold myself together.

"*Haltung*," her father had called it, reverting to German. "It means keeping a good countenance and self-control under all circumstances—I'm afraid there is no word for it in English, *Kinderl*, because it's more than the way you deport yourself and it's different from the British 'being a gentleman,' drunk or sober, at Buckingham Palace or in the jungle. *Haltung*—it's the one thing I was willing to learn from your militarist grandfather, and I'd like to hand it on to you. It's a good thing to have when life turns against you, child. It's a command, it makes you stand up and face things. It's the exact opposite of all the running away and closing one's eyes and what's called escapism nowadays. It means to bear the consequences of what you've done and not to complain and not to be sorry for yourself and never allow anyone else to be sorry for you. I sound funny when I'm preaching, don't I?"

Father smiled and Joy smiled also, because they both thought of Mother, who was so very skilful in the application of pity and self-pity, thriving on it, using it to build herself up as other people used vitamins and hormones, hoarding it as her main asset to invest adroitly and profitably in her various undertakings.

"*Ach ja*, there exists a dictatorship of weakness that can be more malignant than the use of brutal force. I always imagined Lady Macbeth as a small fragile little creature with little white helpless hands. Misusing our sympathy until we're pulverized. Thank God, child, you don't belong to the weak ones. You'll keep *Haltung*. You'll never let yourself go to pieces."

"Neither do you, Father."

"Perhaps not quite. But I almost did, once or twice. When Maud died, for instance——"

Joy's real mother was rarely mentioned between them and never in Angelina's presence. "Why don't we have some hyacinths? Maud always liked them," Father might say, or: "Maud looked wonderful in all autumn colours, tarnished gold, copper, warm browns. Why don't you put a bit of rouge on your cheeks, child, and try those colours yourself? I'd like to see you in them. You—sometimes—it's funny how a child will inherit little traits from a mother she hardly remembers. When you sit still like this and look into the palms of

your hands—that's what Maud always did when she was troubled——”

“But I remember Maud quite well, Father. She was quite—reticent, wasn't she? Shy—or cold?”

“Maud? *Du grosser Gott im Himmel!* Maud was the warmest human being that ever existed. Maud was—remember the little melody you and I like so much? Schubert, A Minor Quartet—the one he used again in *Rosamunde*? That melody, to me, means Maud——”

“But she always kept me at a distance. I don't think she ever gave me so much as a good-night kiss. All the cuddling and kissing and playing I ever knew I got from Mother; I still called her Angelina then, I was still a baby——”

Father smiled absorbedly into the long ago and the never more, and then his left eyebrow went up. “Yes, Angelina was a great hand at the popular national game called Alienation of Affections. Well, I'm only joking, you know that, I hope. You were a very affectionate baby and we must be grateful that Angelina gave you all the tenderness you needed, when Dr. Bryant didn't quite trust Maud's lungs; he was very strict about a few taboos, too strict perhaps, but——”

“Yes, Father?”

“It hurt me often when I came home and there were the two of you, Angelina and you, playing on the floor and squealing and laughing, and kicking your legs, and frisking and rolling like a couple of porpoises; and Maud would sit there with her folded hands and smile at you, just smile, as if she were enjoying it——”

The bitch, thought Joy, the mean, possessive bitch! Took me away from my real mother and made an exhibition of it and hurt her to the quick. Took me and took Father away from Maud, who was sick and could do nothing but sit there and watch it with that quiet wistful smile of hers. And when Maud did not die fast enough, she took a hand in it and hastened the process a bit. I know the sort of slow poisons she has at her command, oh, don't I know them! And so I killed her. I had to kill her before she could poison Charley's life too——

The stationmaster had been busy with ticker and telephone and now he stepped out of his office and planted himself in front of her. “The sheriff and Butch McFarland will be here soon,” he reported. “Butch is his deputy—very good man, he runs our funeral parlour too, gets a guy used to handling—I mean—all sorts of things—sort of in a professional way——”

He stopped himself, embarrassed at having made an indelicate reference to Butch McFarland's familiarity with dead bodies; considering that the one they were going to search for had been the tall lady's mother, alive only a short while ago. Clearing his throat, he went off on a tangent. "Seems Doc Gerrick can't get away so fast on account Mrs. Winston is sorta slow having her twins and old Doc Emmmental has gone into retirement and can't be woke up and he wouldn't do no good anyway, he's creaking in every joint and it's going to rain again any minute. You see, ma'am, we ain't exactly geared for this here sort of emergency. I guess it ain't easy for you, but you've just got to have a little patience."

"Thank you, I'm not impatient," said Joy, taking out her cigarette case, snapping it open, and desolately staring into it; it was empty. "I don't mind waiting," she said, which was a gross understatement. Fervently she wished to be left sitting on that bench, with her hand on the dog's friendly head, for the rest of the night; indeed, for nights and days on end, for weeks and months of respite, before she had to face the worst yet—and with *Haltung!* "If I could only have a cigarette——" she said hungrily.

"I'm sorry, lady, but that's all I've got," said the stationmaster, flipping his Bull Durham pack from his breast pocket. "I'm rolling my own, but that ain't no stuff for a young lady, I guess——"

"But certainly; thanks. Thank you so much," Joy said, eagerly reaching for paper and tobacco. Baffled, the stationmaster watched her quick long fingers complete their task.

"Who learned you the tricks? One of them cowboys on a dude ranch?"

"No. My father. He came from the old country, you know——"

Joy smoked silently and the stationmaster, feeling dismissed, retired once more with a great show of tactful consideration. He had left his tobacco on the bench for Joy.

With the feel of the rolled cigarette in her fingers and the taste of the smoke in her mouth, she tried to conjure up once more the consoling image of her father. "Come, *Kinderl!* let's take a walk," he said and they were in Paris, it was a clear, cool, sunny day, they were walking away from the Crillon, through the Tuileries and across the Pont Royal; there were always slow chains of *remorqueurs* on the Seine and on each barge a little dog would merrily scamper from one end to the

other, and little flags of drying laundry were fluttering in the sun, but that day Father did not give her time to stop and look; he walked with long strides, which meant that he was angry about something, and she could also feel it in the twitching of his fingers, which were holding her hand in the white kid glove of which she was quite proud. She glanced up at his clouded face but he did not notice it, he kept on rolling cigarettes and throwing them away after two puffs. Joy tried to match his pace, but although her legs were too long in general, they were too short when Father had quarrelled with Mother and she was about to give up the race, when he remembered her and suddenly stopped and grinned down at her. "*Je vous demande mille fois pardon, mademoiselle,*" he said, "but would you permit me to present you with a few little flowers?" He said it in French which she had learned the previous year while she had been left with Grandmère in Vienna. This, then, must have been the year after Baby Charles was born; this time he had remained in Grandmère's charge while she was taken along to Paris. "Where are we going, Daddy?"

"I'll tell you—we're going to the enchanted forest. Where people may drop their bundles when they get too heavy."

And so the Sainte Chapelle had been a forest to her and thoroughly enchanted and mysterious and dark, yet floating in its singing blue light, and dream birds were nesting in the slim, golden tree trunks of Gothic masonry, and if you knew the secret word or had the secret key you might possibly fly up and up and up, blue and blue and blue, and never have to come back to the Crillon where Mother had quarrelled with Father. He went ahead, stopping at a certain spot which he seemed to find without looking, and beckoned her to follow. He cupped his hands and held them as if to let water run into them from a spring; but what he caught in his palms was not water, it was that unearthly blue light, and he made as if to pour it into Joy's hands. "First you must take off your gloves, child," he whispered. She pulled them off, she could hardly breathe as she held out her hands and Father poured the blue light from his palms into hers; a few drops of it clung to his hair and his forehead.

"Is it permitted to carry it with me?" she whispered in French.

Father shook his head, smiling. "Not in your hands, child, but perhaps in your eyes; in your mind, if you try——"

That blue—it was a beginning of something, she thought, tiredly, something that in the end had trickled away to nothing. Only the blue light is still there. I can call it any time and it comes to me—even in Tokema.

For months afterwards, lashed to the utterly genteel galley of *Mère Marie-Céleste* of the *Institut des Soeurs de Ste Thérèse d'Avile*, she had used up her entire allowance in blue crayons to try to paint the sublime miracle of the *Sainte Chapelle*.

Father had dropped his bundle in the *Sainte Chapelle* and bought a rich armful of flowers for Angelina on the way to the *Salle Gaveau*, where a study was put at his disposal for his practising. In the large room the dark green draperies were drawn to close out the daylight, empty little chairs stood in disorderly rows, old-fashioned gas lamps were burning in wall brackets at the other end of the study where a piano on a small platform showed its teeth. Mother was standing next to the piano; she wore her tight green jacket with the little hat made of velvet leaves, she looked adorable, and she was talking through her tight little veil to someone invisible behind a door back there. "Wait . . ." said Father, putting a restraining hand on Joy's shoulder and listening to Mother's sermon.

" . . . if I were not certain that he has no better friend in the world than you, Mousie, and if I couldn't count on your devotion, I should never have brought this up; but you know as well as I do how much ground he lost during the years he was tied down in San Francisco on account of Maud, and it's up to the two of us to bring him back to the top. No one can say that I'm not doing my part, why, I'm sinking into this tournée almost every cent my dear poor father left me, I'm doing whatever I can to build up a new audience for him—but, my dear, we're working at cross purposes, and don't misunderstand me, Mousie dear, if I tell you that you've done us a lot of harm in Paris. I'm quite aware that you speak French much better than I do, but, dear me, you're so blunt, so outspoken, don't you see that you're aggravating the critics and on whom do they take it out? On Flori, of course, not on you. And there's another thing, dear, and that's the way you dress; it simply isn't true that no one cares whether your black silk is fashionable or ten years old. They do care for such matters in the circles where I am trying to have Flori introduced, it's simply a different audience from the one he had in former years, and that's what I'm striving for, a smart, elegant, mondaine audience. And if Florian can change his

style and his programmes, I don't see why you can't do something about your way of dressing and behaving. Of course, you may answer me that one can't teach new tricks to an old dog, and I realize that you're at the wrong side of the fifties, but as I said before——"

No, thought Joy, rolling herself another cigarette, I didn't really hear or understand it. I wasn't nine yet, but I have heard it so often in later years that my memory is filling in the cavities. That day I only perceived that Mother spoke with great sweetness, but with a sweetness that grew ever louder and harder: rock-candy sweetness.

"Angelina!" Father called, striding towards her. "Girl, girl, don't use up the entire acoustics, leave some for me, if you please!" and Mother subsided.

"Why, the lovely, lovely flowers——" she said and pulled up her veil to have Father give her a kiss. He overlooked the inviting little gesture.

"I brought them for Mousie," he said. "Mousie! *Wo steckt das verflixte Frauenzimmer?* Mousie?"

Mousie! Joy thought and smiled a little into the cigarette smoke as the small shadow came obediently scurrying out of the past to join Father's. "Well, you lazy bum, I thought the compliments *La Princesse de Merd'alors* paid you had gone to your head so much you'd not deign to do a bit of work," she said, bright and merry as ever.

"You sadistic little monster," Father replied, "I assume you brought your nine-tailed cat along to make me put juice into those bloody variations?" With that he pushed the flowers into her face, and bending way down to her, he kissed her hand and then began to unpack his violin, which Mousie had put on the piano. Mother gave me a little shove between the shoulder blades.

"Come, dear," she said. "We seem to be only in the way here." That was the morning she took me to St. Cloud, to the Institut des Soeurs de Ste Thérèse d'Avile, where I was left when the parents went on to Belgium, Holland, England.

As for Mousie, after training Hendrijk Graaven, a young Dutchman who looked like a half-baked bun and was the first one in a long row of not quite satisfactory accompanists, she returned to the United States and evaporated quietly; and quietly and secretly Father would visit her from time to time in her lair in Berkeley where she had settled as a music teacher. It was always a sign that things at home had become

a bit too involved and that he needed a brisk mental massage and some good strict, invigorating music talk. Funny, dear old Mousie. "Tough as a nut grater. My Rock of Gibraltar. My conscience," Father said of her. "The best friend I ever had, with a heart that knew how to listen . . ."

The last time Joy had seen Mousie had been at Father's funeral, December 1928. A moss-covered, gnarled, tenacious dwarf tree, very old, ridiculously tiny, swearing under her breath all through the service, because instead of his favourite pupil, Paul Horner, playing the second movement of Bach's Concerto in E Major, which would have pleased Father no end, The Girls of the Euphonia Club were singing "Abide with Me," and a trifle flat in sopranos at that. Mousie did not shed a single tear but amidst the general exhibition of sorrow she just stood there, looking wind-swept, and with grim amusement on her shrivelled face. In place of the prescribed words of condolence, she only said: "Can't you hear Flori laugh about the great social event, Angelina? I think I can. Bless his soul—he's well out of the whole mess."

Two weeks later she was out of it herself, having died in her sleep as unobtrusively as she had lived, leaving for Joy a small dark void and her life's savings to the amount of \$328.64.

That was another thing Dr. Behrman had brought to light: the way the people Joy knew and loved as a child had disappeared one by one, leaving her with a bewildering sense of sorrow and loss, and an early inkling about the instability of human relations in general. First people were there and loved you and you loved them, and then, all of a sudden, they were not there any more. Some disappeared quietly and tactfully, as Mousie had done, or they left in the midst of a great, loud, impassioned outburst, the way Beatrice did, after Angelina had called her a liar, because Beatrice had given the kitchen an account of the Fire that digressed in a few points from Angelina's version. Joy cried inconsolably when the ferryboat carried Beatrice away (it was soon after the Fire and they were still living in Belvedere) and the nursery was never the same without Beatrice's black shawl and Joy slept very badly, until Mummie came back and they moved to the house on Vallejo Street. As for Beatrice, "I don't know what she's got to complain about. Father found her a place in Stockton and he pays her a monthly pension on top of it," Angelina said. But then Mr. Ballard lost his money and moved to the ranch and married Mrs. Gomez and Angelina said: "Maud, he must have

been out of his mind when he made that scandalous will; I'm not sure that Gomez woman didn't make him drunk or put some drug in his food. Well, you can be glad he at least established little Joy's trust fund while our dear mother was still alive to look after things."

Not all the people Joy loved were crowded out by Angelina. Grandpa Ballard for instance simply died, which was not less sad, because he would never be there again, and there was a room one wasn't to enter and the ranch house smelled of wet leaves and flowers and also of delicious little butter cookies to be offered to the funeral guests. A year later Uncle Hopper also died, not simply but in a rather complicated manner and completely without flowers and butter cookies. Death in itself being a sad, vague something beyond little Joy's conception, it bewildered her very much that there was no set rule to it. Again, it was only under Dr. Behrman's guidance that Joy began to understand that Uncle Hopper, although he had died of natural causes, belonged rather to those whom Angelina had gently shoved out of her way.

Uncle Hopper had gone out of life piecemeal, so to speak. When he was there, he was all there and a lot of him, fun, noise, laughter; he played and romped with Joy better than anybody else, he brought her presents, he promised her a pony, the house was full of him during his visits. But he was there less and less, and Angelina told Mummie: "Poor Hopper, he is not well, you know what I mean," and Mummie said: "Poor Sis, you certainly have a cross to bear." "Poor Mrs. Hopper," people said, whenever they were talking about Angelina, "poor Mrs. Hopper, and she's such an angel!" Uncle Hopper would bob up and be well for a time and then not well again, and he went on a trip and he came back and he went away, and then he went far away, and "Good riddance," said Mr. O'Shaughnessy, "and let's hope he'll do better in rubber." Which made Joy imagine that Uncle Hopper had to wear high rubber boots and a rubber coat all the time he was in Brazil. Having dribbled away like this, he had been more or less dead even before a telegram that arrived in the middle of the night put a definite end to him. "In Manáos, and of yellow fever, what a terrible death, poor Mrs. Hopper," people said, and Angelina sat on the sofa and sobbed that she couldn't bear it, no, she couldn't bear the thought of having poor dear Clyde's remains being bumped and juggled around by brutal stevedores, let him be buried there and sleep under

the palms of the tropics he had loved so much, and then she hung curtains of black crêpe around her face. Father stood at the window, with a cigarette in his mouth and one eyebrow high up on his forehead, and said: "The only consolation being that you have never looked as ravishingly lovely and helpless as in your widow's weeds, my darling."

But in the end it was Mummie who had left Joy and gone and died; about this, and the quarrel between Mummie and Angelina, Joy had never talked to anyone. Neither as a little girl, nor even at the time she sought advice from Dr. Behrman. Yet Maud's death had completed the pattern, it was the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle. And Father had put his forehead in Joy's hair and said, "I wish I were dead, too, little Joy——"

"Choy," he pronounced her name, little Choy, Choy Kinderl; "I've begged you a million times to watch that foreign accent of yours, Flori," Mother would reprimand him. "Perhaps you think it's charming, but I assure you it makes you unpopular. After all, you are an American now, why don't you try to talk like one? Choy! Makes her sound like a Chinese sing-song girl or something out of Gilbert and Sullivan." But Joy was happy that she had a separate name which belonged to her and her father alone. Otherwise there was quite a confusion about names when Angelina married Father and demanded to be called Mother and she herself was compelled to shed all her droll little baby nicknames and turn into Daughter or, at best, Daughter Dear.

And now even Mother had disappeared, Mother Dear; she had been there, spitefully charming and loathsomely sweet to the last, and the next moment she had not been there any more. Only that empty platform, that swinging little gate in the railing. Click. Click. Click. Gone—and there the circle closed and Joy met herself again: I hated Mother and I killed her.

Her mind began to cloud over once more and she quickly rolled herself another cigarette. Come, come now, let's have some clear, cold, logical reasoning. I had to kill her, it was necessary, there was no other way out. If I hadn't killed her she would have done her ruthless, helpless best, she would have ruined Charles and Susan—and the children——

Suddenly there was a sharp, jabbing pain, a flash, a shot, a drilling needle was touching a raw nerve in her brain: but that's insane, it isn't true, what ever made me believe that Charley needed me to save his marriage? Charley doesn't need

me, he doesn't need anyone, he is a grown-up man, not a baby brother, a soldier he is, a fighter, he came through the war unharmed, he is invulnerable.

She pressed the smoke down into her lungs and held her breath listening into herself, waiting for the all but unbearable moment of lucidity to pass. Why, oh, why do I see it now so clearly, and why couldn't I see it out there on that platform? I must have been insane—out of my mind—demented—

Insane. She shied away from the word, from the very notion that had poisoned and drugged her year after year, ever since a certain conversation with Mother, followed by Dr. Behrman's ambiguous diagnosis. Thank God, there was no ambiguity about Charley, no twilight dimming his life, none of the nocturnal torments, doubts, shadows. He was a sound, sturdy, clear-minded creature of the bright day, full of talent and ideas, yes, but wholly and pleasantly normal. Quite well adjusted, Joy thought, a bitter little smile bracketing her mouth at the trite, overused expression from the popularized psychological vocabulary; but then, his childhood was of the sort to build up a good strong immunity against Mother's small injections of venom.

She opened the palms of her hands as though she were unrolling a fabric, a piece of the loosely woven textile that was her life, to study its colours, pick up a thread at random and pull it out, and look at it with closed eyes, at the thread that was childhood and growing up and, foremost, Charley.

A frothy ostrich boa, a ruffled, pleated, jet-embroidered cape under which Mother gallantly concealed her pregnancy, because: "Flori, I would not dream of letting you down, I shall be at every concert—look how small I am still, nobody will notice anything indecent if I wear my boa like this—" and Father said, a little tired: "But, my dearest darling, can't you see that it makes me nervous to know you're there? All the time while I'm playing, I'm expecting the usher to shout: 'Is there a doctor in the house?' I'm haunted by visions of our child being precipitately and highly indecently born in the greenroom while I'm sweating my way through Sarasate's 'Zigeunerweisen' and it doesn't make me play any better, I assure you."

But Mother braved the London season and the bumpy crossing, and Charley considerably entered the world between seasons and at home, in the house on Vallejo Street. ("I didn't think you Victorians knew about planned babies!" Susan

would tease Mother, who ignored the impudent jibe.) He was fat and heavy and sleepy and hungry, he had a dark fuzz on his head at first, then he grew baldheaded, and finally, he emerged with Father's green eyes and Mother's blonde curls, and when he was put in Joy's arms for the first time he bunched her pinafore in his fists and began to suck it. Joy, just past eight, had not known that you could love anybody or anything with such stormy enchantment, such complete delight, as she loved this warm, live, crying, grinning, kicking, sucking, and through and through miraculous little brother of hers. There was a little place at the back of his neck which smelled deliciously like apricots till he was three, when it began to smell like little boy, which was also wonderful. Charley was hardly three months old when he was shipped to Europe for the fall season and left behind in Grandmère's exuberant care, while Joy was torn away from her little brother—an amputation that made her feel like bleeding to death—to be temporarily parked with Fräulein von Schotze in Dresden. "And don't forget, Daughter Dear, that your father's name means something to the whole world, and behave so that we may be proud of you," Mother said with tears in her eyes. It was a word from Mother's vocabulary which haunted Joy all through childhood and adolescence. It was a word like a whip: PROUD. It was something you could never hope to live up to, hard as you tried, and that made you constantly feel guilty and inadequate. You had chapped hands, your feet grew too fast and too big, you got poor grades in arithmetic—nothing to be proud of; Father received tepid reviews and Charley caught the whooping cough—a disgrace to the celebrated name of Ambros! Somewhere in the background of Mother's life a little clique of her contemporaries was romping about, collectively known as The Girls. Its members were interchangeable but its character and functions stood firm. Mother was exceedingly cosmopolitan during those restless years of concert tours, but no success was full if The Girls back home were not informed of it; and the worst thing about any failure was the fear that The Girls might somehow get wind of it.

"Three cheers for the competitive spirit of American womanhood. The sting of the scorpion, poor little animal, which—or so the Greeks claimed—would frequently kill itself by mistake," Father remarked, his eyebrows raised in amusement and deprecation.

Joy saw and observed much, she understood some of it, but she spoke very little; perhaps because she never had time enough to make herself quite at home in any language or any place. Vienna, Dresden, Paris, St. Cloud, Lausanne, Hampstead, back to San Francisco, and back to Europe again for the next season. A chain of woman teachers, some with slightly sadistic tendencies, some overflowing with the greedy sentimentality of the childless female, all of them frustrated in one way or another. Fräulein von Schotze, Frau von Ranken, Mère Marie-Céleste, Madame Rivoire, Miss Blythe, Miss Warrens, Miss Elthwaite. A lip-pursing, spider-fingered or else balloon-bosomed, double-chinned portrait gallery in Joy's memory. Smell of chalk, blackboard, ink, of cold incense, disinfectants, gym suits. Empty heavy early morning stomach in chapel, chilly dormitories, blue Sunday uniforms with starched white collars. Being marched in prim crocodile formation, along a quai, to a church, to a museum, to a park. Reading forbidden books, harbouring forbidden thoughts. After lights-out, munching of secretly procured chocolate bars, whispering from bed to bed. Sometimes a budding friendship with another of the uprooted children that never had time to come into bloom. Most of the girls kept diaries, but Joy, shy of words, made drawings instead.

All this was called education.

Yet at last there always arrived a day when Father's season was over and the family was scooped up to set sail for San Francisco, and there came two or even three blissful months with Father and Charley, and, of course, Mother too. If there was no reason for Mother to be proud of them, Joy and Charley were extremely proud of Mother, at least as long as they were children. Theirs was the prettiest mother, always beautifully dressed and smelling like night-blooming jasmine. She had smaller hands and feet than anyone else, a fact that made Joy, who suddenly shot up and grew out of all proportion, feel an unsightly clumsy lummox and filled her with deep contrition. Fervently she wished to develop some traits to make Mother Proud of her, but the more she grew up the less hope was there for either herself or Father to reach the difficult goal, and only Charley kept the banners flying.

Before he was five he had won his first blue ribbon in a horse show at the Vienna Tattersall's and through the years he proceeded to bring home trophies and prizes and come out first in contests, scholarly as well as athletic ones. Very early,

figures and numbers fascinated him and soon he wandered fearlessly and securely through the bewildering maze of arithmetic in which his big sister still got shamefully lost. "It's a gift he inherited from the Ballard side," Mother would announce. "He's getting more and more like my poor father, bless his soul. Just wait and see, Charley is going to make money, and lots of it." However, when Charley's gift turned to the abstract realms of mathematics, Father remarked with a certain relish: "I'm not so sure that trigonometry will get him very far on the stock market." By the time Charley was six he could write in a childish, large, but very exact hand, although he steadfastly refused to read and had no patience with fairy tales and similar nonsense. He could speak a fair French and Grandmère's Viennese version of German and, as it turned out much later, he had in these early years filled his eyes and mind with the noble proportions of the great buildings in whose shadows he had grown up in Europe during the concert seasons.

"We are blackbirds, you and I," he once told Joy, "you know about blackbirds, don't you? Blackbirds fly away in fall and come back every spring. I bet their children understand French and German too. And African." He stood before her, firmly planted on his muscular little boy's legs, his socks rumpled, a smudge on his nose, his hands in his pockets, his forehead screwed up, the first front tooth missing; a challenge with an undertow of wistfulness. Joy wanted badly to kiss him, or touch him, reassure him, but she held on to herself and did nothing of the kind. She only knew that she and Charley were something apart from all the rest of the world, for who else would understand what it meant to be blackbirds' children? There was such a close belonging-together in knowing so many things and keeping them between them and never speaking about them—things no one else could know.

Father's moods, for instance, or the way his voice got deeper when he didn't want to show that he was angry, and the sound of his violin from the study downstairs after the sun was down and he played on in the dark like a blind man. The squeak of the loose board of the fifth step from the upper landing for which one could be quite homesick abroad. And the little dog they had seen in a pet shop and desired more than anything else on earth and which they couldn't have because you can't take a pup on a concert tour or into boarding school. There were a thousand things only she and Charley knew: the

strident songs of the market women around the Freihaus, the funny way compartments looked on European trains, the best method of currying favour with a grumpy deck steward, and that the firemen blew a trumpet in Vienna, but rang a bell in Marseille. And that the posters with Father's name didn't get on the walls by themselves but that they cost money and Mother said she'd gladly pay for it, if it would only do any good, and Father stood with his face to the window and his hands clasped behind his back and made as if he were whistling. And that we never had luck with the maids, because you can't get good domestics for just three months and, dear me, we can't afford to keep them on while we're abroad. And only you and Charley knew the signs of Mother's headache days and the days when her heart felt bad, and the days when you had better stay out of her way altogether. It was this that brought you closer than other brothers and sisters and set you apart from them: Blackbirds' Children.

As Joy was so much older than her brother, her awareness of their being different was much sharper and a little sad and she sometimes felt sorry for Charley and filled with the fierce wish to protect him, cover him, defend him—she didn't quite know against what. But Charley was far from needing her protection; he was a little fighting-cock, a game little fellow who planted his hard little fists straight into anyone who would not take him seriously. Indeed once, Charley, four years old, beat up a seven-year-old fellow who had had the nerve to call twelve-year-old Joy a sissy, and he emerged from the fight with a bleeding nose but flying colours. This gallant exploit took place in the nursery of the boat on which they had left England in the summer of 1914, a week after the war was declared; a high wind was whipping the seas, and the boat was overcrowded with hastily returning citizens of the U.S.A.

It was the last crossing for a long time to come, and Joy mused that a war that made people go home to Vallejo Street and stay put was rather a fine thing. Except that it became more difficult than ever for Mother to be Proud. In fact it soon was almost a disgrace to know German, and you'd better forget it, dear, and you mustn't talk so much about Dresden and Grandmère in Vienna. No, they are not our enemies, actually, we are a neutral nation, but they're Huns and Vandals, just read in the newspapers about the outrages they're committing and we don't want people to misunderstand

us, do we, Daughter? Joy flung herself desperately between her little brother and a world growing more hostile by the month.

You had to fight it out, Joy in school and Charley in kindergarten. He would come home with bumps and scratches and in a purple rage. "They say I smell of kraut. They hold their noses. I told them they stink of foul fish. So we fight." He fought, he grew scars like an old warrior, but he didn't cry. Joy took it upon herself to march him to Mesdames Riley's Kindergarten and have it out with them. The two old sisters were of an extreme gentility and promised to uphold in future the peace among their flock; indicating on the other hand that Charley was a very aggressive little boy, very aggressive, indeed—and Joy, who had become thin-skinned and sharp of hearing, felt that what the old ladies thought but did not say was that Charley's being aggressive and quarrelsome was decidedly German and Boche. And a few weeks later Charley brought home a letter in which the Misses Riley deeply regretted being unable to keep Master Ambros in their establishment any longer as he was a constant source of restiveness among their otherwise so peaceful little charges. Although Charley seemed exceedingly happy about this abrupt ending to his kindergarten career, Joy felt that now it was up to her to save him from further rebuffs and keep him pleasantly occupied. It seemed urgently necessary to make of Charley a regular American fellow before he entered grammar school, otherwise life would be a chain of deprecating insinuations and subsequent fights. Clearly, the first stage in his re-education would be to hand him a baseball bat, take him out to an empty lot, and teach him to bat like any other boy his age. But then, regular fellows had regular-fellow fathers, and that was where the rub came in. Not only was Father not a real American, he was also a famous violinist whose hands—as Mother always said—were the only capital he possessed. "What the heck is this?" he asked when part of Charley's sporting equipment came tumbling from the hall closet. "That? Oh! Well—it's just a bat, Father." He turned it in his long fingers and chuckled. "And I always thought a bat was a little animal with funny wings, hangs upside down in daytime and is apt to fly in ladies' hair at night," he said. Joy went forth and watched the big boys play baseball until she thought herself capable of teaching Charley the fundamentals. "Oh, go chase a butterfly," said Charley, who had a mind of his own

and found being trained by a girl even more shameful than being called a Kraut. In the end it was Mr. O'Shaughnessy, Mother's ruddy and boisterous friend, who took Charley in hand.

On rainy days, however, Charley loved to watch Joy fiddle with crayons and water colours and after a while the creative urge was on him and he too began to make drawings of his own. It was always a house he sketched, in front of which a gentleman in a shining top hat led a little dog on a leash. At first it was a very simple and lopsided house with two windows, a door, and smoke curling from a brick chimney. By and by this house grew more elaborate, it gained in size, structure, perspective, and design throughout the years; and by the time Charley was sixteen it had expanded into folders full of floor plans, ideas, sketches of almost blueprint exactness, vistas of buildings and whole streets, some of them from a dimly remembered Europe, others pointing into a streamlined future of glass and steel. And Charley knew that he was going to be an architect.

But all this came much later and in between lay the clouded years before and during and after the war. The closer the United States pushed—or were pushed—towards it, the more nervous and irritable Mother grew. Poor Mother, married to a man who had four brothers fighting on the side of the Hun. She fretted and worried, and suffered and ate herself up in restless, scattered, futile little actions, designed to rub out the taint of her husband's being a foreigner. But it always came through. There was Father's name, for instance; whoever outside of Austria had heard of a man being christened Florian? Joy's large feet, for instance, the way she had learned in Dresden to make a curtsy—which was regrettably different from the true Anglo-Saxon curtsy. German labels were ripped from Mother's coat bought in Berlin, and Charley's little Tyrolean leather shorts locked away in a trunk. He came pouting to Joy: "Old people are all crazy," he declared, "they don't know what they want. Grandmère says I must kiss every lady's hand and Mother says she'll bop me on the head if I do, but Father does, he does kiss the hands of ladies, and what is a fellow to do? You tell me, Joy." But Joy herself was floundering in the deep, muddy waters of Foreign Relations.

There was this pathetic restlessness that spread out from Mother until it filled every nook and corner of the house. Father only smiled and struck a few chords on the piano.

"Brahms' Requiem, you heard it in Dresden, remember? '*... und machen sich viel vergebliche Unruhe ...*'" he said in the forbidden German. "That's what the Bible calls it, Choy: *viel vergebliche Unruhe*—they make for themselves much futile unrest—"

Of course, there were many moderate voices amidst the spreading psychosis, but moderation is by its very nature never as loud as fanaticism. "You are funny people, you Americans," Father would say. "Superlative in everything. Superlative in common sense. Superlative in idealism. And now superlative in emotionalism, which is a dangerous thing. It's a runaway horse without the bridle of thought and intelligence." It made Mother furious when he said: "You Americans." Perhaps that's why he says it, Joy thought with the high-strung sensitivity of her fourteen years. Not as if there had not been almost as much German blood in this their cosmopolitan San Francisco as there was Anglo-Saxon; but the old German families outdid each other in showing their patriotism and demonstrating their being true red-blooded Americans. At last Mother, too, found a solution and she begged and was unhappy and cried until the Chinese water torture of her silently dripping tears made a hole in Father. "All right, all right," he shouted—and it was very rare for Father to raise his voice, "but I'll make a hell of an ambulance driver, and if that's what I'm ending up to be I might as well have saved myself from fighting with my family and started my career as a bloody, stupid, goddamned tin soldier. Come, Choy, let's take a walk," and he slammed out of the house and strode off, without a hat as usual. Neither did Joy have time to grab hers, but she kept in step with him until he stopped at the top of Hyde Street, threw his cigarette away, and took a deep breath.

"No Enchanted Forest to drop our bundles, what? But it's beautiful here, and I love it, and I hate to have myself shipped overseas. I hate it and I'll make a mess of anything that isn't music, you can bet on that," he said.

"Why do you go then, Father? We're not even in the war yet. And—and we'll miss you, Charley and I."

He looked at her with a wry smile and looked away again, over the bay. "For atavistic reasons, if you know what I mean. No man likes to be thought a coward, it's a peculiar masculine weakness, but there you are, *Kinderl*."

"But—you are—I don't quite know how to express it. You

are a musician. Mousie says musicians live in another dimension, I mean——”

“You mean being a musician makes me a bit less than a man—not quite a man? That’s not very flattering, Choy. I can be blackmailed as well as the next fellow into doing what I don’t like to do. Don’t let’s talk about it. Look—it’s beautiful—look——”

Look, Father would say every so often, and you could see. *Listen—and you could hear.*

The bay was in its best and clearest emerald mood, Contra Costa on the other shore green with the new spring, and Yerba Buena Island delicately etched into the seascape; farther out the shore line was washing its feet in the Pacific, and far away and not quite real, Mount Tamalpais carrying the sky on its purple shoulder. The fishing fleet was out but a swaying forest of masts and chimneys seamed the Embarcadero, ferryboats scuttled across the smooth surface like slow water beetles, and small white sailing craft seemed to stand still and look at their own reflections in the mirror of the bay. Two white-bosomed schooners in full rigging were slowly and proudly making their way through the Golden Gate, gliding on a beam of molten metal towards the blinding sun in the west. “Look, Choy,” said Father. “Listen——”

There were the voices of San Francisco; the steady muffled roar of downtown, harsh cry of seagulls riding on the breeze like scattered bits of white and brown paper; polyglot calls of street vendors, grumbling and clanking of the cable cars, and a deep-chested bellowing conversation between two large steamers manoeuvring into their berths. In the streets the high-stepping staccato of carriage horses on cobblestones, automobiles grinding up the steep hills, their complaint drowned by the frantic and yet merry signals of two fire-engines racing down Sutter Street, and the trap-trap of boys running after them for all they were worth. Somewhere an organ-grinder with his squeaky, toothless rendering of the “Anvil Chorus” and somewhere an Italian singing “Santa Lucia,” and somewhere a child playing a Clementi sonatina at an open window and someone whistling in the street below, and “Yes, I’ve come to love this city,” Father said. “A baby giant with a dirty face, but I love it, *ergo* I have to go away and do my little share of stupid things in the all-over stupidity of the war. Well, it seems that man is a fighting species of animal and has to kill, as he has to eat, sleep, and propagate. Sometimes I won-

der which species is going to take over after the last handful of homo non sapiens have devoured each other. The ants? The bees? The patient polyp that builds corals at the bottom of the sea? Well, Choy," he said, coming out of his musing. "Let's go home and tell Mother how smart she looks in her Red Cross uniform. And, Choy—this was by way of our own private fare-thee-well. Take care of Charley while we are overseas. Take good care of yourself, child. You are quite precious to me——"

When the parents left for overseas, Mother at last Proud again, it was the first time Joy did not like her and was ashamed of the untoward antipathy and felt guilty about it. Charley seemed not greatly touched by the occasion. Only when Joy took him down the Peninsula to the Grey Fox Military School and said good-bye to him did he cry. He did not cry like a child, this beloved little brother of hers, but like a man: grim, soundless, ashamed, with averted face, and only the shaking of his shoulders betraying him.

"I'll visit you, Charley, I'll ask Miss Elthwaite for week-end leave, and we'll go to the house, and I'll cook for you, and there'll be Christmas vacations," she said, helpless before his mature little boy's grief. "The war won't last and soon we'll all be together again——"

Charley in his little uniform, the polished leather belt, the cap set at a smart angle, epaulettes on his broadening shoulders, badges of distinction on chest and sleeves; he would carry a growing collection of trophies to Vallejo Street and stand grinning before the standard cups and shiny almost gold urns: "Aren't they ugly? Aren't they just too terrible for words?" Of course they were; but how wonderful of Charley, seven years old, to notice and make fun of it. "You remember, Joy, when I was little?" he said to her on a Thanksgiving when Mousie had invited them. "You remember, Joy, when I was five or so, I had a notion that I would grow up fast while you would stop growing, so that we could get married?"

"Well?" Joy asked.

"Well, I have changed my mind, Big Sister," he said, and he looked amused, almost like Father.

"That's too bad, Charley. I counted on it. Now I'll probably become an old maid," said Joy, feeling unaccountably dismissed, feeling Charley moving away from her. At first they had been more closely bound together than ever during these years when the parents were somewhere in Europe, on the

fringes of the war, and while Joy always remained the older one, the one responsible for her little brother, the distance of time between them had seemed to shrink. Then, all of a sudden, it widened rapidly, unbridgeably, as Joy became a young girl and Charley grew into what she had fervently wished him to be: a regular guy.

The more the military school shaped him into the standard mould, the farther away he went from her; it was what she wanted and yet it hurt. Sometimes she caught herself guiltily wishing that Charley might not be quite so self-reliant, strong, healthy; it was, she realized, a very selfish wish and she kept a strict rein on herself. However, he might come down with the measles, or perhaps mumps, nothing really painful or dangerous, if he would just fall ill enough to need her. But Charley went through the usual children's diseases without any fuss, without even letting her know of it. When she was sixteen she dreamed of becoming a nurse in a leper colony; it seemed a highly commendable and picturesque vocation for a lonely child. But by the time the parents returned, she knew that she would have to be a painter—or nothing at all. . . .

Joy reached for the Bull Durham and mechanically rolled herself another cigarette. Nothing at all, then, she thought. Almost unconsciously she absorbed the fine bluish pattern of the smoke under the sparse single light overhead. On the stone floor, too, were moving patterns, flitting shadows of two moths, thumping thick-headed against the glass overhead. And then she stood with Charley at the Oakland Station waiting for the train that brought Father and Mother back—and a moment later she knew why today, leaving from that same station, she had had to kill Mother. Had to try to kill her, in any case. Because since the moment of that arrival the struggle over Charley had been on between her and Mother. During those years after the war there had been fall and decline all around Mother and the only thing to stand up and feed Mother's ambitions and make her PROUD was Charley. Mother loved him and did not care, probably never even realized, that her love was a voracious, destructive thing. (Mother loves me like the silkworm loves the mulberry leaf, Charles himself had once remarked.) Whereas Joy had tried, and tried hard, to weed

out whatever egotism might have been left in her big-sister love. There was a line in *Rosenkavalier* which Father often quoted and had even written into the autograph book of her adolescence:

Mit leichten Haenden
nehmen und halten,
halten und lassen
Mit leichten Haenden,
Wer nicht so ist
den straft das Leben
Und Gott erbarmet sich seiner nicht.

"With easy hands—to take and to hold, to hold and let go
—With easy hands—else life will punish and God will have no
mercy on thee. . . ."

In those troubled years after the war Mother's hands had been heavy on Charles; grabbing, possessive hands, liny, soft, evil hands, and thank God and all His Angels, thought Joy, that he had come away undamaged. Gone away, got himself a scholarship, worked for a living when there was no money, sold magazine subscriptions, vacuum cleaners, washed windows, strung wires, anything. Did what he wanted, became an architect, married the girl he loved. Charley, my little brother, don't you see that I had to do it? I could not stand by and let her destroy everything you have built for yourself?

But no, Joy remembered, he is not my little brother any longer; to Charley all of Mother's machinations and manoeuvres are no more than a joke. He had always laughed them off—she could hear his good-natured laughter, see him pat Mother's shoulder: What's cooking in your little cauldron today, weird mother? Eye of newt and toe of frog, double, double, toil and trouble? A line from one of his letters sprang to her mind: No reason at all to worry about the undersigned, Schwesterherz, there's hardly any danger in this business and the occasional little discomforts just help to reduce my waistline. (The little discomforts consisting of being dropped by parachute behind the enemy lines to do his bit in French and German.) Jesus, no, Charley, you don't need me to help you, it was insane what I thought and what I did—

Joy began to tremble. The dog put his forepaws upon her knees and wanted to lick her face; she stared into his funny,

intense, ill-matched eyes and he stared into hers. "God, God, God," she whispered. God help me if Mother was right all along. Perhaps it is true. Perhaps I am insane. Perhaps I have been insane for many years without knowing it, but she knew it and wanted to protect me from myself; that's perhaps why she never let me go from her side: she knew all the time that something in me might snap or break and set me off on a trail of horror——

She put her face into the dog's warm yellow coat and tried to cry, but inept as she was at it, no tears would come to her relief; only a dry whispering sob as she breathed the forsaken name into the dog's pelt: Fred. Fred. Don't believe it, Fred, it isn't true, it can't be true, please, Fred——

"... thin ice, Choy," Father had said, "we all are walking on very thin ice; it takes a lot of fancy skating to keep on top of it and not crack through into the nasty chaos of a nervous breakdown. . . ."

If Father had suffered a nervous breakdown during or after the war, it must have been a soundless one and well concealed. But when he came home from over there in 1919 he was a very changed man, with thin, lifeless grey hair, stooped on days when his arthritis was very bad, less tall than before, too old for his years. He would stand at the window and drum on it with his swollen, crippled fingers, drum the rhythms of concert pieces he was never to play again. He would stare at these fingers as if to hypnotize them back to their former agility; he would examine them over and over: some days they seemed better and then again worse, a sickly polished shine on the tight red skin over the inflamed joints and knuckles. He kneaded his fingers, rubbed them, pulled them, moved them. "Does it hurt, Father?" "Not much, Choy, not worth mentioning." "*Souvenir de France*," he called his fingers now. "Maybe this new treatment with bee stings will do the trick. . . ."

There was not a treatment he had not tried, at first the legitimate ones recommended by doctors who in an aimless way hoped that one or the other might do some good, although nobody had yet discovered either cause or cure for the crippling misery. Later came the quacks, the miracle doers, the faith healers, the patent medicines, oils and rabbit furs, poultices and saltless food, this and that and another thing, and every time Father believed for a week or two in the new therapy because he so desperately wished to believe. On the

piano in his study stood the violin case; he would open it and tenderly undress the Empress, lift the instrument to his chin, and with the sweep of the great violinist he would poise the bow over the strings for a second before he began to play. He could still play, Florian Ambros, of course he could play. But not well enough for an audience and certainly not well enough for his own standards. "They made a few blunders in God's bookkeeping department," he would say. "I had a buddy, Judd Branley, who was a postman; he lost both legs; naturally I, being a fiddler, got my hands crippled."

"You must read that article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Angelina," he would say some other day, his left eyebrow high up on his wrinkled forehead. "In the Auvergne they found some prehistoric skeletons who were also arthritic, the poor fellows. But then, I presume, to a caveman it didn't matter so much whether he could play in concerts or not——"

For a while Mother was pointedly cheerful, pumping optimism into Father at all hours and busyboding all over the place. "This year's season is over, anyway, and by next fall you'll be all right again; just make a slow start, why don't you play something simple, the audiences like it better, anyway, than all your heavy stuff. What you need is to build up your self-assurance again—I talked to The Girls about it, Caroline Brooks's sister-in-law is now president of the Euphonia Club, and Irma Frankel has got herself on the Programme Committee of the Thursday Afternoon Society, they give musicals from time to time, and what about that benefit of the Junior League—you could play that Thing by Bach on the G string, that's easy, isn't it——"

He played the Thing by Bach before the ladies of the Euphonia Club, he played once in public and never again. "I am neither a charity case nor a lady's lapdog," he said in a white-lipped rage, "and if it's a matter of earning money I'd rather fiddle at a street corner and go around with my hat, that would at least be honest." He packed the Empress away and through his newspaper friends he let San Francisco know that he was willing to take on a select group of gifted students. And that was the end of the glamorous career of the great Florian Ambros.

To Mother it was the hardest blow of her life: all lustre rubbed off, no more cosmopolitan splendour, no food for her hungry ambitions. "When I married you I didn't dream I would someday be the wife of a music teacher," she was

heard murmuring. She still had Hopper's star sapphires and her chinchilla wrap, but her good Parisian pre-war dresses had gone out of fashion and even her beautiful hair which had given her so much distinction became a thing of yesterday in this rude postwar world of thin legs, free love, and shingled heads. The only thing left to brag about to The Girls were Charley's ever-growing collection of trophies and his good grades in mathematics and geometry. But if Mother became once more very visibly and ostentatiously a martyr as in Uncle Hopper's times, she was a most gallant one, and by and by she began to rally. "We'll manage somehow," she would announce, "even though I'm only a foolish little person I always did have a good head for figures; just let me handle things and we'll manage. Let's say you give only twenty lessons a week and charge twenty dollars per lesson—and then there is the four thousand interest from Joy's trust fund——"

"I wouldn't dream of touching Choy's money," Father shouted. "She'll darn well use it for her studies. I'll give ten lessons a day if it's necessary to keep us afloat and I'll take for them whatever I can get. Don't forget, Angelina, that for reasons known only to God wealthy people as a rule have little talent and talented people have little money; we'll just have to cut our budget to the bone. But Choy is going to art school. Old Merryl is an opinionated fool and very academic, but that has never done any harm as a foundation, and they say Merryl is a decent teacher otherwise. Later Choy may want to go to Paris on her four thousand and study the real thing. The child has talent, she has eyes, she sees things her own way——"

"Well, that's the limit! Art school, of all things! She'll smell of turpentine and have dirty fingernails and wear no corset. At a time when a girl ought to pretty up and learn to be charming, go to cotillions and dances, meet substantial young men and have a suitor or two——"

One of Angelina's hopeful schemes was that by some miracle her bony, long-legged, ungainly, and reticent stepdaughter would at the appropriate moment and, as it were, overnight change into a winning creature of charm and beauty, a born belle of the ball who in the natural and desirable course of events would marry a millionaire and put the family on the map once more. There were tears and a major fight and Joy felt guilty at adding another disappointment to Mother's bur-

den, but also deeply grateful for Father's remaining adamant. Art school was by no means a paradise and old Merryl, one of San Francisco's sacred cows, put her in a straitjacket and handcuffed her with his methods, principles, and beliefs derived from the bad, fat-choked side of the nineteenth century. The crayon got paralysed in her hand and the brush dried out when Merryl inspected her work over her shoulder; his arm would shoot out from behind her and his accusing forefinger with the grooved old man's nail would point out every little deviation from a deadly and absolute realism. To him *The Russian Bride's Attire* at the De Young Museum was the masterpiece of all times, but Joy's eyes had been conditioned by her early acquaintance with the French Impressionists; her painter was Van Gogh, whose name in those early twenties was hardly known in the United States outside of a small circle of connoisseurs. Drawing, life classes, nature studies, still life, landscapes, all done to please old Merryl and all of it against her innermost grain. At last, during the third year, the old master deemed one of her water colours worthy of being hung in the annual school exhibition. The theme had been given by him—*Sunset over the Golden Gate*—and Joy thought that her opus would have made a fair poster for tomato ketchup. But Mother was faintly Proud, Father felt vindicated, and Joy, a little tired and a little melancholy and very discouraged, continued giving up another little piece of herself day by day.

"What's the matter with you, Daughter? Why can't you be like the other girls? They are having fun but you just mope and sit and look——" Mother poked and nudged.

"I've got to look before I can paint," Joy answered logically.

"Sometimes I think you just want to be different at any cost."

"Well, I was brought up a bit differently from the others," answered Joy, who could still feel the stitched-up seams of her patchwork education.

"There's a big football game next Saturday, maybe Brooks, Jr., wouldn't mind taking you there." Brooks, Jr., old Mrs. Bensinger's grandson, was an unlovely little snob, still in the acne and clammy-hands stage—rather unrestrained hands, though.

"Thanks, no," said Joy. She felt lost in this era of hip flasks and raccoon coats, when youth was flaming with the two greatest discoveries of the twentieth century so far: the general

use of contraceptives and the adaptability of combustion-engine-driven vehicles for purposes of sexual intercourse, partial or complete.

"Can you tell me what's the matter with me?" she asked her father. "It's true, I'm not quite like the other girls and it worries me, I feel like a lump of lead when I'm with kids of my age. I simply can't get interested in those gilt-edged college boys with their beautiful tail coats and their abominable stupidity or with the young veterans who keep bragging about their conquests with the mesdemoiselles d'Armentières. Even in art school—they are not my cup of tea; maybe I am too fastidious, but there is a bit too much free love about for my taste and not enough soap and water, and they all smell of cheap Italian food with a lot of garlic in it. Believe me, I'd be happy to be like the others; it's no fun to be different, Father——"

"No indeed, it isn't. But that's what the ugly duckling thought, too, *Kinderl*."

"That's just it. If I were sure of myself—but there are ugly ducklings who never turn into swans."

"Trouble in the creative department, Choy?"

"I don't quite know. I hate the way I'm painting, and I haven't found my own way—or maybe I lost it en route. I've become—well—sort of timid. I don't dare paint things as I see them——"

"That's nonsense, Choy! Dare, try, let yourself go—and don't let old Merry! catch you at it."

And so, for once, she had dared to let herself go with brush and spatula and oils; she went through great labour pains and gave birth to a canvas, but this piece of her very own creation almost frightened her. "It looks like nothing on earth or in heaven," said Mother, and that was exactly how it looked. Even Father seemed greatly puzzled; he turned it one way and the other, trying to find out what was up or down on it. "What's it supposed to be?" he asked in great embarrassment.

She had tried to paint Father's hands which couldn't play the violin any longer, because those tragic hands were what she loved most in the world; loved, pitied, worshipped, and knew in every invisible nerve and pain. Of course there were not five but twenty fingers on the hand of a violinist playing a fast passage, each finger a leaping, sick, wounded animal, and there was the bow zigzagging back and forth, and the

honeyed colour of the Empress, the curves, the vibrations, the dissonances, the polished swollen knuckles with their white highlights on flesh inflamed to a harsh orange; furthermore, and to tell it all, there was lead-coloured water stagnant in the yellow clay of a trench, and the pattern of an exploding shell, worked with the spatula in thick white spirals into the black sky of war. And Father's eyes, green, tired, melancholy yet amused, many eyes watching the many fingers, and, yes, unfortunately it looked a bit like a palette you had forgotten to clean up after the day's work. . . .

"It's meant to be called *Souvenir de France*, Father——"

"Oh, is that what it is? Well, well, well. I'm afraid I'm too old for this sort of thing; I don't quite understand it, child. I'm coming along as far as Cézanne and from then on I get lost. I can't sort the truth from the swindle, and that's the only thing that counts. As long as the moral fibre is intact——"

It was one of Father's favourite formulations: the moral fibre. "Mind you, I'm speaking as a man whose moral fibre got badly frazzled," he had once said with his melancholy smile; it was one of their many, many confidential talks at the beginning of his sickness.

"How can you say such a thing, Father! You, with your artistic integrity—I won't listen to it."

"It's easy for a retired old music teacher to keep his little molehill of integrity intact; it's when you go out with your fiddle in the market places and make your spiel to attract the customers, shout louder than the other fellow—you have been to freak shows? The bearded virgin! The boneless wonder! Those years before the war when success was running away from me and I running after it with my tongue hanging out, and never catching up with that goddamned *chimere*——Did you hear me play 'I Palpiti'? No? You may thank your creator for that. Ever hear me play some of those bloody, brilliant pieces by Sarasate? Aha! In London, Queen's Hall, 1912? Holy Brahms, it certainly was the filthiest *Schweinerel* ever heard on that stage! You see what I mean, Choy? If I had been a born virtuoso full of trills and tricks and bravura, that would have been a different story entirely. But I'm a musician and maybe I'm a purist, but that's what God and tradition and my teachers made me and what I should have remained. *Grosser Gott*, when I remember those years——night after night you have to go out before an audience and play pieces you hate to play and you know you play them badly——

every night you stand in front of an audience and feel as though you were dressed in nothing but a nightshirt and a rather soiled one at that—and the houses are getting emptier and chillier and the contracts rarer and rarer and the expenses higher and higher— Have you ever stared an empty house in the face? Those half-filled rows, it's like looking into a huge mouth with bad teeth, lots of them missing and those left are decayed and full of cavities; the sneezing, the coughing, the squirming—do you know what's the worst, child? When the applause stops before you have reached that god-damned door way off at the side of the stage. Suddenly it is so terribly quiet, like falling down into a well, and you don't dare look into the audience, you know, anyway, that they didn't like it and there's not a drop of sympathy or mercy left in the whole house; they're turning their backs on you and pushing out of the hall and it's all over. And you feel the cold sweat run down the inside of your legs so that you're afraid it will trickle out of your beautiful dress trousers; no applause, just that awful, negative quiet, your feet weigh a ton each and the exit door is still miles and miles away and it will take you hours of wading towards that infernal exit— Oh, my God! But that wasn't the worst yet. The worst was facing Angelina afterwards. That peaked little face of hers, those soundless tears caught in that crushed smile like in a hammock—ach, Choy, I'm afraid God will call me on the carpet for many things in which I was remiss. But I'll tell you what I'll say to him: 'It is true,' I'll say, 'that I've been a person of little strength, but it was You, God, who created me of the too soft material that's used for making musicians; and being of Your own design and creation, I might deserve some leniency.' It is true that I denied Bach three times before the cock crowed, and played cheap music against my own conviction and ability. But before You send me to Hell, God, will You in Your great mercy consider that I have spent quite a number of years in purgatory and inferno already and will You kindly deduct those years from the stretch I'm supposed to serve in frying oil down there? Amen.' ”

Through the smoke of his cigarette he smiled wryly at Joy as if it had all been only a joke and in a little silence she smiled compliantly back at him.

“If you felt so terrible about it, why did you play all that trash?”

“That's not a fair question, Choy, and you know the answer

anyway. Angelina wanted nothing in the world but my success, and between her and the various impresarios, and no Mousie to strengthen my back, they cooked up those catching programmes. Mind you, I'm not blaming her for anything. It's the basic idea of American womanhood: if you love your husband it's your sacred duty to wheedle, push, pull, nag him up the ladder of success. A little alien, to my kind of thinking, I admit. A woman who doesn't love her man more for his failures than for his triumphs should never marry an artiste. If Maud had lived——"

He left it unsaid and Joy waited in a small silence for him to go on.

"I think often at heart I wasn't meant for the concert stage, not as a soloist. It's true, I had my seven fat years, but somehow it was a success without roots, cut-flower success. It wilted a bit too quickly. I was young and I had such pretty black hair with lots of Pomade Violet de Parme on it, I believe that's what they applauded mostly. Who knows, though—if Maud had lived, many things might have been different. Chamber music—you won't remember the time after the Fire, when I tried to build up my own string quartet, you were such a little baby then. Maud's health was a trifle shaky, I didn't want to expose her to the strain of travelling and, naturally, I didn't want to go on tour and leave her alone. Training the Ambros Quartet seemed a good answer to more than one problem. Nice little quartet it could have been. Unfortunately the West was still in the state of innocence as far as music goes, especially chamber music. Sometimes I think it still is, except for a few quiet, dreamy souls, and, of course, a considerable flock of music snobs. Probably from her point of view Mother was quite right not to approve of my quartet. There was neither money in it nor any personal triumph, just good honest teamwork——"

"Oh, but I do remember your quartet, Father. I was hiding on the stairs in my nightie ever so often, listening; I wasn't really such a little girl when Maud—left us. Don't forget, I was all of six—and a very old six at that."

"Yes, you were a precocious little thing and now you are a very mature twenty. I remember you could read and write very early and what you couldn't write you put down in those wildly inspired drawings of yours. Want to see them?"

"Don't tell me you kept them, Father?"

"Of course I did. I understand children's drawings are be-

coming the fashion and as soon as you're a famous painter I'll sell them for a fortune; shrewd sense of investment, that's all."

No one but Father could let you know how fond he was of you without ever putting it into words. He unlocked the drawer where he kept Brahms's letters and brought out a batch of sheets filled with the flamboyant scrawls in which little Joy had put down what she had been incapable of expressing otherwise. There was the bluebird who could speak but didn't. A bed so large its foot end had found no place on the paper, and two people in it. Many attempts at portraits of Angelina, with yellow hair and a tiny mouth, all in profile but with two eyes, because, obviously, two eyes were what she had. A woman hiding behind a large square of spread-out white—a handkerchief—caption: *My Mummie*. That was when Mummie had read another one of those letters which were always pushed under the entrance door and made her cry. And Mummie again, leaning against thick black strokes that meant rain while trees were bending in Van Gogh spirals and a green lightning zigzagged across the smeared dark background. And at last there was Mummie gloriously sitting on a cloud amidst very fat angels and spitting angry black crayon blobs upon Angelina, who stood in front of number 76 Vallejo Street. "There's a lot of talent in them," Father said meditatively, "although they're a pretty confused lot."

"They're mostly autobiographical, Father."

"Art is always an indiscretion and we give ourselves away whether we want it or not. By the way—leave that *Souvenir de France* with me. Even though I don't understand it I can see that it's not a swindle. And listen, Choy: you have talent, don't you forget it and don't let anyone discourage you. You know what I mean: don't let them break down your moral fibre—"

Father had locked them away, the early scrawls together with her one attempt at letting herself go. And in the fall of 1928 they vanished with many other things in the fire that destroyed the wooden cinder box of their Vallejo Street house and left only the blackened, gutted, goutish protuberances of its typical San Francisco façade.

It so happened that Joy had spent the night of this catastrophe in San Jose, where she had given a lecture on "The Meaning of Impressionism versus Expressionism" to the culture-hungry but not over discriminating members of the Women's Club. The same evening her parents had attended

the first concert of Father's favourite disciple, Paul Horner, a young fellow of great promise and slightly megalomaniac self-assurance, whom Father taught gratuitously. It was lucky that thus nobody was harmed in the fire but, on the other hand, a great misfortune that by the time the disaster was discovered in the empty house it was out of control. Gone was the worthless together with the invaluable; the ashes of Joy's childish drawings inextricably mixed with those of Brahms's letters; the wooden ice-box saved by the concerted efforts of the firemen, while charred crumbling black bits of wood were all that was left of Father's great Stradivarius.

There rose loud lament in the press on both sides of the Atlantic; the European papers pointed out that a violin like the Empress belonged to the entire musical world and that consequently her destruction was a loss to the entire world. There were articles full of facts, recapitulations of the Empress' fascinating history, and sentimental essays sobbing that never, never again were we to hear that noble, that unique, that more than human voice which the greatest master-builder had mysteriously and magically enshrined in the body of the cremated instrument. There were, indeed, a few bitter comments pronouncing that the great violin should not have been left as the private property of Mr. Florian Ambros who, while deserving our full respect as a musician, might have been lacking the necessary facilities to protect the irreplaceable instrument from its tragic fate. Whereas the American newspapers did not fail to emphasize the financial side of the sad occurrence. With the childlike trust that fame, beauty, and similar intangibles are best expressed and measured by exact figures, the amount which Stradivarius had originally received for the Empress—4,200 lire—was given; the price for which Mr. Ambros had purchased her from one of the Hapsburg archdukes—\$17,500; the offers from various great violinists he had rejected, some said to be as high as \$40,000 (and there you may see that investing our money in a thing of which we simple folks understand nothing might be even more profitable than buying securities on our bull market or sinking it into tomorrow's oil wells, was the comment). Not without respect it was mentioned that Mr. Ambros, whom many of our middle-aged music lovers might still remember from their heydays, had insured the fiddle for \$50,000, a fact which not only showed how highly he valued his instrument, but might also mitigate the sorrow of its loss to a certain extent. . . .

Father wanted neither to read nor to hear of the clamour, but Mother took the old scrapbook out of its long hibernation and pasted dozens of new clippings under the old yellowing ones.

Before their home had burned down there had been much bitter talk about money, especially the lack of it, but now it was quiet in the apartment which the always obliging Johnny O'Shaughnessy rented to them in one of three duplex houses he owned on Greenwich Street. Mother, more helpless and compelling than ever, although with a strange, almost triumphant little gleam in her clear brown eyes, took the loss of their home very hard. "I'm not complaining about being poor; it's losing caste that is so difficult for me to face," she cried, because evidently people who lived in a rented apartment didn't belong to the same class as people owning a home.

"Why, Grandmère lived in an apartment and you certainly can't say that she had no caste," Joy said appeasingly, but this only brought on a new fit of martyrdom in Angelina. She turned her eyes imploringly to heaven and covered her ears with protesting hands.

"Don't mention Grandmère, Daughter Dear, my nerves are on edge as it is; I dare say I've done my duty by the Generalin and have borne my cross, but please, don't let's talk about Grandmère, not now, when I need every ounce of the little strength I've left." Joy suppressed a smile, she got up and touched with caressing fingers the finely curved lines of the Generalin's old baroque commode. It was not so easy to forget Grandmère, particularly now, when their own furniture was burned and they had taken out of storage that left by the Generalin. It was true, the few years Grandmère had lived in San Francisco had put Mother's endurance to a hard test. There had been many tear-drenched scenes and much silent suffering when Father, as soon as it was possible after the war, insisted on taking his mother out of starving Vienna and letting her live out her life near him. Two of her sons had died in the war, middle-aged colonels unfit to endure the hardships of the perpetual Austrian retreats; the third one had been hit in the badly timed blowing up of a bridge and returned minus one arm and one eye; the fourth was swallowed up in the vortex of disintegration and made a precarious living by selling champagne, cigarettes, and lottery tickets. For once Father had taken a firm stand, had overrun all of Mother's protests and objections, and at

last she had given in with as much good grace as she could muster. But if she had expected the Generalin to be a beaten and subservient victim who, grateful to accept largesse and charity, would permit herself to be put away in some home for the aged, she had been greatly mistaken. The Generalin arrived in a decrepit wheel chair pushed by Djuro, who, in uniform and white gloves, with his white hair and military bearing, looked as distinguished as any of the numerous Romanoffs in exile; she was well past eighty but had decided to stop counting her years before her seventieth birthday and she was as vivid, gregarious, and garrulous as ever, chattering away in any of twelve languages except English. Her hair was still pitch-black, her mouth the same scarlet slash clicking the whitest and cheapest set of false teeth ever seen in the United States. She still smoked cigars, and her hats, dresses, gloves, fans, and petticoats were of 1890 vintage; but withal, she was a great lady; there was not a shred of resignation in her and, far from willing to retire, she had brought all her belongings with her and proceeded with great zest to establish herself in a tiny cold-water flat she called her salon. She scandalized San Francisco by sharing her apartment and every waking hour with that bony, silent, devoted, and dignified old gentleman everybody thought to have been—or, grotesquely, still to be—her lover. Yet she and her salon attracted many people and she was never without callers. They came out of curiosity, to look, to listen, to gossip, to be amused, or simply because they liked her. She seemed to take a fierce pleasure in shocking other old ladies and particularly those shrilly cheerful clumps of nice middle-aged matrons, The Girls. But the young people flocked around her eagerly, students, intellectuals, the self-appointed Bohème, the Lost Generation—they all were infinitely fond of the Generalin; they laughed with her and brought her little presents and took from her lessons in French and German and in the Art of Living and they happily carried each of her obscene, profane, and terrifyingly outspoken pronouncements over every hill of the city, across the bay to Marin County, and even down to the sedate realms of the Peninsula. The children loved Grandmère, not only Joy and Charley, but all the children of the neighbourhood; only Joy and Charley loved her most. Grandmère, dear, funny, lively *enfant terrible* who to her last breath fully enjoyed the prerogative of the very old: to speak the truth and not give a damn. Djuro died before her and that might have

been sad and also bothersome, if the Generalin had not the same day expressed a wish to receive extreme unction, amused the good natured and broad-minded priest by telling him a few slightly off-colour anecdotes, and then peacefully and without any fuss gone to a heaven full of dead soldiers.

"It's a pity you didn't like my mother, Angelina," Father said quietly; "she was always taking your side. But I agree, don't let's mention her if it makes you nervous. I beg to submit, however, that this apartment, seven rooms in a good house in a good street, is not precisely squalid. I don't think, really, that we are hopelessly *déclassé*. If you remember, even the Duchess Schwarzenburg used to live in an apartment and you and your family didn't exactly look down on her because of it."

"You can't compare that. San Francisco isn't your old Vienna. In Vienna I could have married an archduke—and maybe I should have."

"Maybe. I understand Joszi now has a little Hungarian restaurant on Third Avenue. On the other hand, you never cared for goulash and that's his *spécialité de la maison*."

Mother could stand anything better than when Father grew sardonic; she put her face into her handkerchief, gave a pitiful muffled little sob, and melted out of the room. Father looked after her with a smile that was sharp around the edges. He took a deep breath and instinctively rubbed his flat stomach, just below the diaphragm, where it always felt like a load of heated rocks.

"You want some of your medicine, Father?" Joy asked. "You feel uncomfortable?"

"Thanks, child, I'm fine. Just a little bit like the wolf in 'Red Riding Hood' after they filled him with stones and sewed him up again." He got up and stiffly went to his back room where he was now spending most of his time in the Generalin's Beidermeier wing chair. There he had some books Joy brought him from the Public Library, some music presented to him by pupils and friends, a practice fiddle of a not too bad Tyrolian make, a rented upright piano; there was also a bed in a small alcove which could be closed off by a curtain. This was what Florian Ambros called his study now. Eight months before the fire he had undergone an operation and for a while he had put on a little weight, and then he had begun losing it again.

That was one of the reasons why Joy had not gone abroad to study painting and her water colours became ever more

timid and she was still putting out Sunsets over the Golden Gate which tourists occasionally purchased, for ten dollars apiece, at the Cliff House. In the shadow of Father's illness, painting became quite irrelevant to her, except as a trickling source of income. These years were the mould in which Joy's character and resigned destiny were shaped. "I can't go away, when I'm needed at home," was her answer to every question. For being needed is not all burdensome duty and painful obligation but also a satisfying substitute for the real life that remains out of reach. . . .

Joy was needed by Mother to help with the household, because Mother was delicate and not used to penny pinching and managing with just a slatternly coloured day maid; she was needed by Charley, although he did not know it; but until he went East he had to be shielded from the evil currents running through the home. Her four thousand annually were dearly needed when Father's health began to fail and he grew nervous and irritable with the strain of not letting anyone know about the queer muffled heaviness below his diaphragm. When he had finally gone to the doctor, his trouble was first diagnosed as a nervous disorder and a year later there was some talk about duodenal ulcers and a milk diet and there came X-ray treatments and a first operation and a second one. And recently even brisk young Dr. Bryant—old Dr. Bryant's son and heir of his practice—had given up his professional pretence of optimism. "Mr. Ambros isn't helping us any longer," he said; "since he lost his Stradivarius he has given up the fight. He has thrown in the towel. The best we can do is to keep him comfortable. . . ."

It was hardly more than ten minutes since George Watts and Major Ryerson had left the station, yet Joy was passing through years as one may pass through a dream eternity during the second between the ring of the alarm clock and the waking up. The stationmaster stepped out from his cubicle and posted himself near the rails; the yellow dog made a polite gesture of recognition but did not leave her side. "Number 178 coming. Freight train for Ogden, Utah; delayed—should have gone through at one-forty-five. Are you sure you don't want coffee? I could wake up the missus, she wouldn't mind a bit fixing you some, I'm sure."

"Thank you so much. Really not."

The freight train came out of nowhere, first a panting, a clanking, a cyclops eye; whistle, bell, yellow streak of light, reflection on the rail, white steam on black night, blue overall, red face, hand waving from the engine, cars: grey, yellow, red cars, flatcars, cylindrical cars, boxcars, geometric pattern, abstraction; clank, hiss, endless, more cars, more yet, more, tail-lights, rumble, leading into the kerb like a dancer, like a skater. Gone. Black, night, stars, yellow dog, white chalk on blackboard; Tokema. You couldn't paint that—or could you?

Joy shook her head, let go of the impression, returned to the back room where Father was dying, day by day, of cancer of the stomach. Keep him comfortable, let him have a little hypo whenever necessary, said Dr. Bryant. Joy loathed that cloying expression from the hospital lingo: "a little hypo"; it smelled of cute little nurses making eyes at young interns. "Are you comfortable, Father?" she would ask every so often and she could hear herself sound like a confounded nurse spouting false cheer.

"Quite comfortable, Choy, perfect." He was sitting in the wing chair, the steamer rug spread over his sharp knees, and he smiled up at her from the book he was reading. "I'm having myself heaps of fun with Mozart's letters, they are so amusing; down to earth, fine, tender, ribald, wise, everything. What a man he was, a rebel with the courage of a lion, and yet gentle and innocent as a lamb. You know something, Choy? Next summer we'll go to Salzburg and wallow in Mozart, just the two of us; what do you say, Kinderl, we'll sneak away and leave Mother behind."

"That's a wonderful idea, Father. I guess it's time we got a little whiff of Europe."

The weaker Father grew, the thinner wore the cover under which he had been hiding a homesickness about which he never spoke. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes. The reading lamp sculptured his face into a smiling mask of hard lights and shadows. He was keeping up his pride by not taking to his bed but spending his days and many hours of the night in his easy chair. He even gave a few lessons, still. "Only generals like my father die in bed," he had informed Mother with a flicker of his old irony. "Violinists play their last piece standing up." Two or three loyal pupils stuck it out with him to the end, because they knew that from no other

teacher in the whole wide U.S.A. could they learn such purity of style, such an uncompromising standard of interpretation. It was up to Joy to space the alleviating injections so that the first drowsiness had worn off and the next attack of pains was still far enough away to wedge in one of those lessons; yet the intervals between relief and new agony became ever shorter and the demands on Father's smiling heroism grew all but intolerable.

"Green——" Father said, his eyes still closed, his crippled fingers resting limply between the pages of Mozart's letters. "Over here we are apt to forget what that means: green. A meadow. Not a lawn, not a pasture, not a prairie, not the plains, not the swamps, not even the greens on the golf links. Just a meadow, grass up to your knees. I'd like to chew a blade of grass, Choy, it would taste of earth and rain and the tiniest bit of honey. Not alfalfa, Choy: honest grass. Red clover, bees humming. Buttercups in spring and autumn crocus in fall and cushions of thyme all summer long and higher up in the mountains arnica and gentian and—let's go there, Choy, and you'll paint it for me, that green, green meadow——"

He opened his eyes and smiled, almost surprised. "I didn't know I missed it; I fell in love with America so deep it lasted me for a lifetime. But, yes, perhaps Angelina is right and I have never become a real American for all my trying. We'll go to Salzburg together next summer, child, and that's a promise."

"Okay, sir, it's a promise," Joy said brightly; "I'll scrape up some extra money by feeding Culture with a capital C to the club ladies and treat you to all the coffee with Schlagobers you might want."

"You don't have to scrape. When Mother's ship comes in with that fifty thousand insurance money we'll be filthy rich and the society columns will call you an heiress," he said, and Joy could see that the pains were coming back.

"Do you think it's time to make you a bit more comfortable?"

"Thanks, I'm quite comfortable. Run along now and let me commune with friend Mozart. He's good company."

"If you want me a little later, just call me. I'll be in the kitchen."

"Run along, run along. And don't let's pamper me too much. I'm not an infant and I don't want to have an

obnoxious pacifier pushed into my mouth the moment I twitch a brow, nor a needle in my behind. I'm comfortable, I'm telling you——"

Mother's ship didn't come in on schedule and the queer little gleam of triumph in her eyes grew dimmer and her voice more petulant. A procession of unpleasant little men with portfolios obtruded themselves into their privacy. Inspectors, adjusters, lawyers; there were investigations, examinations, and depositions and conferences, and at one critical moment the insurance company not only refused to pay off the expected fifty thousand dollars but hinted ever so politely yet menacingly that the fire had been caused by a negligence so gross it bordered on arson and crime. The four thousand interest from the trust fund which old man Ballard had put aside on Joy's first birthday was a meagre income for Angelina, whose past had steadily grown in splendour and riches in proportion to the diminishing of Florian's earnings. Joy took to colouring Christmas cards—and never mind what it did to her moral fibre. It was a challenge to Mother's gallantry. "If you can make some little extra money, so will I," she announced. "I wasn't trained to earn my living, but I think I could make lots of money by embroidering those charming petit point evening handbags that are so much the fashion; The Girls are simply crazy about them."

Unfortunately the work gave her a splitting headache after ten minutes and she was forced to stay in bed with a migraine for three days after. "You're all so selfish," she was moaning, "you leave everything to me. Other women have husbands who take care of the business and of things but Florian never did. I think if he's well enough to give lessons, he'd also be well enough to talk to all those horrible Montgomery Street people; and what about Charles? He knows that his father is sick and that I'm not practical enough to handle such difficult matters; why doesn't he come home and stand by me?"

"Because I wrote him to remain under all circumstances where he is and to stick to his guns," Joy said calmly. As far back as she could remember she had stoutly put herself between her brother and the insecurity of their surroundings, and now he was a straight, healthy, handsome, bright, and manly youngster who knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted to become an architect, tear down every Spanish, Moorish, Gothic, Venetian, Tudor, and otherwise phony and horrid eyesore on the American scene, wreck all French Norman chât-

eaux, Swiss chalets, Renaissance palaces with Victorian trimmings, Egyptian movie houses and Greek temples harbouring Middletown's post office. He was going to build Houses instead, just honest Houses for honest people to live in. But in 1929 there were not many architects in the United States from whom one might learn how to build such houses; and having finished high school at seventeen, Charley had made a pilgrimage to Taliesin, to sit at the feet of the one and only man he considered a great architect. Joy was glad to know Charley was safely removed from the turmoil of the fire and the subsequent mess and commotion, from Mother's valiant laments and her soft, pitiful battle cries; and from the heartbreaking spectacle of Father's dying a little more every day.

"Why don't you do something?" Mother would reproach Joy, with the Greek chorus of the Girls commiserating in the background. "Why don't you go and talk to George Watts, as long as he is representing the insurance company? He always liked you, he'll listen to you. Make it clear to him that we're not asking for charity. I don't see where he gets the nerve to quibble about our claim, after those enormous premiums we paid year after year. The little shyster—that's all he is, even if he did worm his way into big business."

Joy called up George Watts and he gave her lunch at the St. Francis, and he patted her hands and told her that she had been a lovely baby and that she was now an even lovelier young woman; but otherwise there was no result. And so Mother herself resolved to go into the lion's den, Mr. Watts' office, but she came home in a highly belligerent mood and sailed into the back room with all valves opened. "You simply can't imagine how pompous that George Watts has become and the manners that man has acquired. As if I hadn't known him when he was a snout-nose at Tiburon Harbour. Does he think he can make passes at me, just because he has some influence and because I have no one to come to my defence? I should have slapped his face, that's what I should have done, that scoundrel with his filthy bachelor manners. I can imagine what sort of women he must be used to! But I'll talk to Johnny O'Shaughnessy about it and he'll show him who has real influence in this town!"

"Yes, my darling. Why don't you?" Father said a bit too gently. Johnny O'Shaughnessy, well on his way to a seat in the state Senate, was another man whom Mother regretted not having married. High in her forties, she was still what her

generation used to call a fine figure of a woman, unassailed by any doubt about her ability to wrap any man around her little finger. "Sometimes I really think you don't care one way or another, Flori," she said plaintively. "But I do, poor Angel, I do," Father said and no one could have told whether this was meant as a tenderness or a grim mockery. He took her hand between his emaciated and yet swollen fingers and bent his head to kiss it but she pulled it away. Joy knew what was coming now—the ever-same ever-repeated litany: "If you had only sold that fiddle to Mrs. Arlington, we wouldn't have to go through all this trouble. We could have forty-five thousand dollars in the bank. What am I saying? With those forty-five thousand we would have made a fortune on the stock market like everybody else—we would be rich by now—but no, you had to keep that fiddle which you didn't even play any more. Good Lord, when I remember how I begged you to sell it—sometimes I really think you must have been out of your mind, Flori, say yourself, it was sheer madness to reject that splendid offer. Forty-five thousand dollars—but no, you had just another one of your obsessions——"

"Maybe. Such a nice obsession, though. *Du grosser Gott*, even you must understand, or at least have an inkling, Angelina, what that fiddle meant to me. That fiddle—it stood for everything I've ever been and ever wanted to be—it was the only part of myself that was left after you had turned me into a goddamned little hero who can't make his fingers move. I couldn't have sold that violin, just as I couldn't sell my daughter to a whorehouse or my soul to the devil. I'm sorry—I suppose I've been a misfit all along in this country where even God Almighty himself rates a few notches below the great national idol: the salesman! That fiddle—oh, what's the use! Would you, please, do me a favour and leave me alone for a little while—I am—I am—a bit uncomfortable——"

After many months of haggling over their claim, Joy came into Father's room on a certain evening and he was not in his chair but in bed, his eyes veiled by morphine. "Father—there is good news. Mother just phoned—she's downtown, she said not to worry, she's having a bite to eat with Mr. O'Shaughnessy, she might be a bit late—but, Father—it's all signed. The insurance people gave in—it's quite a favourable settlement. They've agreed to pay thirty-five thousand."

There was a little silence and Joy wondered if he had heard and understood; he seemed to be wandering off in some hazy

distance where she could not reach him. "Congratulations," he said at last. "Angelina always gets what she wants. She's a charming woman, irresistibly charming; neither Mr. Watts nor Mr. O'Shaughnessy can deny that. And she means so well. Just think of it? Thirty-five thousand dollars! A heap of money in exchange for a bit of charred wood that could sing while it was alive——"

Joy stood at the door, still somewhat breathless over the good news, and Father pulled himself up in his bed but he was soon slipping down again. "Come here, Choy, I want to tell you a secret," he whispered. "Come close——"

He beckoned with his poor knobby forefinger and a queer, wild expression was slashing his face; he had lost so much weight that every smile seemed a grimace. "Come here, I must tell you something," he whispered. Joy was frightened. Have I given him too big a shot by mistake? she thought; or did he swipe some of it and give himself a little hypo?

"Listen, Choy," he whispered, "but don't ever talk about it: she did it herself. Burned my violin. Burned the whole damned house down to get at that violin and at that money. She did, Angelina, with her own lovely little white velvet hands——"

"But that's crazy. You must be crazy, Father——" Joy said. (When you were frightened you said such things without thinking. You must be crazy: and only three years later it had come back to her as a deeply troubling echo: Crazy.) Father looked like a madman, he was smiling and whispering like a madman, nodding his head and tapping with his crooked forefinger on her forehead; it was the eerie, exaggerated gesture of a bad actor playing a madman. "Keep it in there, Choy—don't ever breathe a word about it, because it's a crime she committed. Burned down the house, burned the Empress, burned my soul in the bargain—if you forgive the outmoded expression——"

"But, Father, what gives you such an idea? How could she—why would she——"

"Why? That's quite simple. Because she loves me. It's her way of loving—ah, *Gott*, Choy, I hope you'll never understand how much Angelina loves me." Pain and a fierce laughter were flickering across his face. "Would you mind leaving me alone for a little while? I'm a bit tired."

"Shall I come back a little later and make you comfortable?"

"Thanks, no. I'm quite comfortable, quite. Just tired. Good

night, little Joy. *Gute Nacht, Kind. Mach's gut. Aber geh jetzt—*"

During the last few days Father had switched more and more to German; probably it had become too much of an effort for him to speak English. "*Gute Nacht, Vater*. You'll call me if you need me, promise? I won't go to bed for a long time yet. I'm writing Charley a letter."

"Give him all my love," said Father and laughed a little. "Sounds shabby, doesn't it? But it means a lot if you listen to its very meaning: All my love. All of it. *Gute Nacht*. And, Choy," he said in German as she reached the door, "go to Salzburg and paint me a meadow that's really green. You've talent, don't forget that. Don't let her discourage you—nor push you—"

Later that evening she went to his door but he had turned off the light and seemed to be asleep. She could hear him breathe, deeply and slowly. Ten o'clock, resting comfortably, she wrote into the chart she kept for Dr. Bryant.

In the morning, when she entered his room, he was dead.

A very beautiful and strange statue of faded alabaster was lying in his bed instead. His eyes were closed, he must have died in his sleep and even his mouth had not slackened, as if he had kept *Haltung* to the last. On the night stand was an empty bottle which had contained some sleeping pills prescribed for him at an earlier stage of his sickness. Take one or two at bedtime. Dr. Bryant. There was also a little note for her:

For once I'm using some common sense; I'm bowing out while I'm still comfortable. Saving you and myself some unnecessary and most disgusting weeks—I know you'll understand. I feel very good. Just tired. Mood of Brahms, First Symphony, second movement. Stand by Angelina, she needs you and I trust her into your hands. Thanks, child—*jetzt haengt mir der Himmel voller Geigen—*

It was an old German saying, a folksy expression of complete bliss: For me heaven hangs full of fiddles. . . .

She took the little note and stuck it into her garter, a rather frivolous hiding place considering everything, but the only place where Mother wouldn't find it. She woke up Mother, who took the blow like a lady, with that surprising calm and fortitude she was capable of producing when it was least expected. She left Mother alone with Father in the back room

and then she called Dr. Bryant and sent one telegram to Charley and another to Mousie over in Berkeley.

Twenty minutes later, when Mother came out of the back room, the empty medicine bottle had disappeared from the night stand and only Father's open cigarette case was left, with two cigarettes in it. Dr. Bryant arrived soon, muttered a few suitable words of sympathy and condolence and took care of all the red tape connected with either birth or death. No mention was made of the possibility of a suicide. And there was another uncontested fifteen thousand dollars due on Father's life insurance.

Mother didn't go to pieces until after the funeral, which was a very splendid social event, and doubtless would have amused Father greatly, had he been able to attend in his new and transfigured state.

And six weeks later, in the midst of all her grief and sorrow, Joy had fallen in love with Fred Hollenbeck.

At times Fred Hollenbeck was still very near and she could put him before her closed eyes exactly as he had looked when she tried to paint his portrait during their two weeks at Pismo Beach: the strong blue eyes, the almost white eyelashes and brows, the contrast of parts of him tanned to a pale brown and parts still pink and hot with sunburn and peeling skin. A certain tall fair palomino quality she had not quite been able to bring out. There was not a detail she would not remember—at times. At other times, though, she would unroll that sketchy, never completed canvas and scrutinize it carefully and it was the portrait of a stranger she had known only slightly. But then, perhaps you could never know another person but slightly. Even with yourself you were only superficially acquainted; you could not foresee what you might be capable of doing until you had done it. You might come to a point when you were not even sure whether you were sound of mind or a raving, killing lunatic, as Mother had thought. . .

Once in a while Fred still wandered in and out of her dreams and when she awoke his voice was still in her ear, and for a few hours a warm afterglow of the dream might remain with her and some of the leaden weight of the empty fifteen years since seemed to be lifted from her, only to descend soon again. For Fred had been one more in the long

line of people she had loved and, like the others, he, too, had in the end quietly withdrawn and disappeared. A parting, less polite and less final than from those who had gone and died, it had left a vague little pain with her, as of a bungled, not quite completed operation. For five years he had continued to send Christmas cards; and last summer she had come upon a photo of his in a national magazine: Frederic Hollenbeck, Washington trouble shooter! A bald-headed man—well, his palomino hair had always been a little thin; he had rather lost than gained weight, which was laudable and indicated many strained and purposeful hours of making push-ups, lifting dumbbells, and getting slapped around on the massage table; what had changed most was his mouth. It had acquired the pinched-in, almost invisible lips characteristic of most successful American men—characteristic to such an extent that Joy could spot a successful American among any crowd on any street in Europe; just as she could spot the lived-through, thought-through, suffered-through face of a European refugee in any crowd in America. At Fred's side smiled the well-dressed Mrs. Hollenbeck, complete with corsage and sable scarf.

. . . not the least reason for the instant success of the President's newly appointed sharp-edged, twenty-carat-brained economic adviser lies in the ease and grace with which Mrs. F. O. Hollenbeck makes friends and influences people in finicky Washington society. Mona, as she is known to her wide circle of intimates, was previously married to Robert Boyd, scion of the Akron Rubber and Tyre family, sportsman-pioneer who died in the crash of his self-piloted airplane. (See issue of May 22, 1936.)

A slew of children surrounded the handsomely smiling couple. Two adolescents, apparently the crop of Mrs. Frederic O. Hollenbeck's lucrative first marriage, and three little palominos, offspring of the obviously blessed Hollenbeck-Boyd union. Congratulations, Fred! That's what you wanted, wasn't it? A great career, an important position, a happy family, and money to spare, Joy had thought, unmoved and quite detached. And yet, for many nights thereafter, Fred had uncontrollably wandered in and out of her dreams, young and eager and so much in love with her. . . .

A day at the beginning of November 1928; San Francisco's Indian summer had just come to an abrupt end. Joy was waiting for a streetcar at the corner of Greenwich Street and

Van Ness. The tall young man arriving at the same corner half a minute later carried in one arm a bulky, unwieldy parcel and clasped under the other a bulging portfolio gaping over a load of weighty-looking books. He searched up and down the avenue, hesitated, then he put down both his loads to take off his hat with elaborate politeness and ask Joy: "Excuse me—is this where I catch the streetcar to Market Street?"

"Why, yes. I'm waiting for it myself," she said. He thanked her, put on his hat, and picked up his loads again. Joy, whose eyes had been trained on the heavy movements of the muscle-bound models in Merryll's life class, couldn't help but wonder about the contrast between the slight, slim, bookish appearance of the young man and the effortless way in which he lifted and carried the weight of these two encumbrances. He had turned his face the other way as if to point out that his question was strictly factual. Had Joy not still been dwelling in the murky, lightless grief of those weeks, the utterly respectable little gesture would have made her smile. As it was, she felt faintly sorry; she would have liked to have another good look at the fellow. His face had seemed interesting and, from a painter's point of view, attractive. It's the exaggeration, every part a bit too long, she thought; the forehead, the nose, and particularly the space between nose and mouth. The chin too; yet it's definitely not an El Greco elongation. Interesting face.

Two and a half years later, at Pismo Beach, when she tried to paint his portrait, she had come to love this face too much to do good work. Also, Fred insisted on realism and a faithful likeness, whereas she wanted to let go and paint the thing within, the essence. "You're worse than old Merryll," she told him; it was meant as an insult. At which he would only laugh, pick her up, carry her away from the easel, dump her on the smooth, wet sands of Pismo Beach, kiss her till both of them had no breath left, and then launch into a brief lecture. "Essence, my eye! If portrait painting isn't representative art I don't know what is. I want to be represented as I am, see, so that our children and grandchildren will know how the old man looked in his prime. If the great old masters had been lazy sloths like you moderns, we wouldn't know today what sort of a face Pope Paul III had—or Rembrandt, or—or——"

"Thanks ever so kindly for the instruction, but I've cut my

teeth on Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and they were very old hat even then," she would answer, and one of their splendid little fights would be under way. They had fallen in love with each other because they were such opposites, and for the same reason they were never bored with each other, not for a single minute. There was so much exchange, such perpetual give and take, such pleasant friction, so many entertaining disputes, so many ever-new discoveries and expeditions into each other's worlds. A sharp wind blew from the first hour of their acquaintance to the last.

That first gust of wind—it came suddenly tumbling around the corner of Greenwich Street like a drunken brute, pushing Fred's hat off. Kicked it up into the air, dropped it, trundled it down the avenue, flung it between two cars, a truck, and the streetcar, side-swiped it at the last moment, and let go of it with another kick and dash and bounce, some thirty feet away. There is a particular cunning maliciousness in the way such a hat will quietly wait to be caught and suddenly take flight again just to make a fool of its pursuer. But Fred did not even try to run after his hat; helplessly he stood there, both his arms loaded, and stared with an exasperated and slightly stupid expression after the fugitive. Joy, however, acquainted with the caprices of San Francisco winds, found herself spontaneously galloping after it; there was a loud angry dissonance of tooting horns and complaining brakes on all sides of her, and in the jam of abruptly stopped cars she could only rescue the hat by firmly stepping on it before it should escape again. She tried to pummel it back into shape before, with a rueful smile, she held the sorry object out to its owner. He had at last put down his bag and parcel and gave her a friendly grin; the streetcar they had been waiting for had in the meantime pulled away. "Thanks," he said, "thanks a million! But you shouldn't have done that. You make me feel like an unmitigated ass, which I probably am, but——"

"It's our wind—we're used to it," she interrupted. "And you're not from here."

"Gosh—and I was dead sure I'd shed that Middle Western twang," he said. "But I'm afraid Beloit, Wisconsin, sticks; and now you've missed your streetcar on my account. What are we going to do about it?"

"Wait for the next, I suppose," she said, taken in by his friendly, small-townish lack of reserve.

"There's a taxi, that's better than waiting in this blow-

hole," he said and had already surprisingly stopped the cab. "I suppose I ought at least to spread my cloak over a puddle for you, but as I have no cloak and you have no puddle, a taxi will have to do."

Efficiently, he managed in spite of his bundles to lead her gently to the taxi and Joy, much to her surprise, did not protest. She felt as if a window had been opened and let fresh air and light into the dark room where she had been dwelling. It was a little adventure which she was suddenly and unexpectedly willing to accept. "I'm not in the habit of sharing a taxi with a stranger——" she said however, to save her self-respect.

"Neither am I," he answered dryly, slammed the door, and sat down next to her. "Now—where may I take you?"

"How far are you going?" she asked.

"Pioneer Society, wherever that is. Promised to cart this stuff there for my Aunt Mathilda, and I beg to announce that Aunt Mathilda is no figment of my imagination, even if she sounds like it."

"You mean Mrs. Browder? Mathilda Browder?"

"You know her?"

"Slightly. Mother knows her quite well, though. Everybody knows everybody in San Francisco and the Browders are one of our old families. We are a small town too, in our self-conscious, cosmopolitan way."

The Browders were registered, sealed, and approved pioneer stock, which meant that the first Browder had arrived in '49; it was a distinction unattainable to the Ballards, who had not come until '51, an irrevocable mistake of the first San Francisco Ballard which made Mother sore whenever she thought of it. Like many other venerable relics, Aunt Mathilda, Percy Browder's impoverished widow, was charitably dragged along by society in various honourable and badly paid jobs that weren't called jobs but functions. At present she was cataloguing the Pioneer Society's collection of local relics, and the clumsy parcel Fred was lugging around were the boots and spurs of somebody who had been Somebody in the city's early history. "Old boots," he remarked, "Pioneer Society, Aunt Mathilda, Ancestor Worship, junk and bunk!" A ribald popular doggerel hummed in Joy's head and she was startled, and yet it seemed quite natural, that Fred at the same moment was muttering the same quatrain—not to her but to the window on his side.

"The miners came in forty-nine,
The whores in fifty-one,
And when they got together
They produced the Native Son."

He gave her a sly little side glance: "Or does that make you tell the driver to stop and get out of the car in righteous indignation?"

Joy shook her head and laughed; it felt as though she had not laughed in an eternity; maybe she hadn't. "Wait a moment—now I think I know who you are; didn't you give some lectures in some of the clubs? Serious stuff—I read about it in the *Chronicle*, I just don't remember your name——"

"Fred's the name, Fred Hollenbeck, if you want to be pedantic. Yes, I was served up to the Elks, Rotarians, Bohemians, et cetera. Scared the pants off them—at least that was my intention. But will they listen to sense? Of course not! They won't get off the merry-go-round until they're kicked off, bless their stupid little heads. You can feed them facts and figures until it comes out their ears, give them all the statistics, the background, the history, the precedents, drum the law of economic cycles into their noggins, warn them till you're blue in the face that at the rate they are going a crash is unavoidable; but they won't listen, thank you, Mr. Hollenbeck, they're not a bit interested in any solid information. They prefer betting on hunches, the fatheads, it's the national pastime."

"I know what you mean. I do a bit of lecturing myself, off and on," Joy interrupted timidly before he could really begin breathing fire. God save us—a crusader! was what she thought.

"You do? What's your subject?"

"Oh—well—about paintings—culture, more or less—appreciation of art——"

"Lord, no! Not art!" Fred had called out, terrified, and again he had made her laugh.

"What's so bad about art, Mr. Hollenbeck?"

"It's vague. It has no rules, no laws. It lacks precision."

A fugue by Bach, a Beethoven quartet, Father practising the same four bars for hours, days, weeks, until they were flawless and perfect; the altar in Ghent on which the Van Eyck brothers had worked more than twenty years. "Now you're talking plain nonsense," Joy said hotly.

He smiled; it carved two sharp lines into his lean cheeks. "Of course, and that's another thing I have against art," he agreed amiably: "I simply don't know the first thing about it."

That was the beginning. The second time they ran into each other was in the elevator of the Public Library. "What are you doing among the bookworms on this bright, blue day, Miss Ambros?" he asked. "Boning up for another lecture on art?" There was unconcealed pleasure in his eyes and Joy was glad that she had shed her mourning and was wearing her nice blue suit.

"No—I just picked up a book——"

He stole a glance at the tome which she vainly tried to hide behind her handbag. It was pure economics, *Progress and Poverty* by Henry George. His mouth twitched as he attempted to suppress a wide grin. "And you, Mr. Hollenbeck?" she asked.

"Me? Well—I was looking for something I need for my Ph.D. thesis," he said, clutching his yawning portfolio under his arm. "Oh, to hell with it," he suddenly said, pulling a book from it and pushing it under Joy's nose: Faure's *History of Art*. They stared at each other and then they burst out laughing. The elevator stopped at the main floor and together they walked out into the mild brightness of a California December day. "How about a cup of coffee?" he asked.

"Why not? But make it tea for me," Joy answered to her own amazement.

"Swell. Where do we get some decent tea for Milady?"

"Have you been to the Japanese Tea Gardens? No? Let's go there, though you'll probably loathe it."

They always laughed when they were together, they always fought, and always made up. "You're all brains and cold logic," Joy would accuse him. "I'm sure you have somewhere a hidden little shrine where you're praying your own Ohm mani padme hum to your own little fetish: two and two makes four. Two and two makes four——"

"And you are too emotional," he would retort.

"What's wrong with being emotional?"

"Like the day you ran after my hat—all emotion and no clear reasoning. That old chapeau cost me four forty-five when I bought it and I've worn it since I graduated from high school, ten years ago. If I figure that wearing a hat has cost me forty-five cents per annum—mind you, these are slightly in-

exact figures—it has been completely amortized and its value is down to zero. Especially after you'd stomped on it. On the other hand, the way you flung yourself in front of that truck—why, you might have broken a leg, or an arm, or gotten yourself run over altogether—just to save that worthless lid of mine. That's what I call too emotional; it's unsound illogical thinking. My heart stopped——”

“It did?”

“You know damn well it did; for that matter it still does—every time I see you or only think of you——”

“If I weren't emotional I wouldn't have fallen so hard for you——” Joy whispered, and there was obviously no other answer than to pull her behind one of the dwarfed pine trees of the Japanese Garden—their usual meeting place—and kiss her soundly.

Different as they were, they had also much in common and they agreed on many important points. They both liked to walk in the rain, for instance, and they had their most refreshing talks while the cold moist air was beating against their faces; their lungs unfolded, little drops collected in Joy's rebellious hair, and Fred would take her wet hand, pull it down into the pocket of his raincoat, and hold it there in his. Such walks set them apart from all the musty, airless people who were frantically hunting for taxis and buses or squatting dejectedly before their smoking fireplaces. And they both swam like seals and no surf was too cold or too rough for them. Or, for instance, wasn't it a rare accident and quite significant that neither of them had been in love before? “Really not, Fred? Cross your heart and hope to die, really not?”

“Really not. Not really. Not like this. I had no time for romantic nonsense.”

“The same here. I had my hands full with my family. Neither time nor inclination so far.” Joy began to smile. “You know what my father said about all those coltish, immature, sloppy no-account affairs? The mores of the jungle, he called it. Since the witch doctors have removed a few taboos from sex, the U.S.A. primitives flaunt in your face what before they did and thought only in Puritan sin and secrecy; that's what he said.”

“That's right. I wish I had known your father, I think we would have got along well. Look at the mess most of the kids are making of their lives! Burned out before they're twenty-five. Thank God, you and I, we're neither immature nor so

awfully primitive; we know what we're doing and where we're going."

There was a fine balance of companionship and passion, of serious purpose and gay exhilaration. There was a good freedom between them, a feeling of brisk fresh air. "Let's keep the windows open, Fred darling; always," Joy would say every so often, and to her, "always" meant marriage and a home and a family and growing better and ever more mature together, middle-aged, old. "Always" to her meant: Always. . . .

The stationmaster stepped out of his office and buttoned his coat. "It's raining again," he said.

"Oh, is it?" Joy asked. The rain came down in heavy streaks of water with a sound of tearing taffeta, with an obstinate boogie-woogie on the roof, with a splashing on black puddles from which it ricocheted in miniature fountains of glittering jet. It was an all-over rain, loud and violent, but almost invisible in the blackness without, and turning into twirling sticks of glass and silver only where the lights of the station hit it. Joy had not noticed it, she had been too far away in the past. "Raining? Is it?" she asked.

The stationmaster threw a worried glance at her. "You sure you're feeling okay, lady?" he asked. "Ain't it getting too damp out here?"

"No, thanks. I like rain. Always did——" she said.

The stationmaster shuffled a bit, scratched his chin, made as if to write on the blackboard, and finally crept back to his desk. "Won't be long now," he said.

Happiness, thought Joy. Yes, I was happy then. Whatever else happened to me before and has become of me since, I know happiness. I had it and what more can anyone wish or expect in life? Yes, even I, Joy Ambros, had my share of happiness. It's not a commodity that comes in great big slabs and hunks, I guess, only in tiny dribblets like honey in the nectary of a flower; but once you had it you never forgot the taste of it.

Only a few days ago she had come upon a photo of Carmel Mission in a magazine, and with a rush of sadness and joy she had remembered a moment when she had been standing with Fred in the little Mission garden; a bird had been sing-

ing and a beetle-brown monk tying up some honeysuckle vines in the long tranquil shadows of late afternoon. What else? Nothing else. Just one of those shining, high minutes. Just this: Happiness. I wonder if the gracious, wealthy, and popular Mrs. Frederic Hollenbeck got more of it than I? she thought. It's a slippery thing, is happiness, you can't hold it, you can't keep it, you can't paint it either. She had tried it once, during her good years with Fred. A pattern—coloured dust on a butterfly wing, it rubs off at the slightest touch. But I had it.

For once Joy had played the leading part in her own life and everything else had been reduced to dim movements and muffled sounds in the background. Even Mother. Mechanically and dutifully Joy nursed her through the months after Father's death, when Mother went completely to pieces and could not be left alone in her fits of despair and remorse. Remorse about the destruction of Father's violin? No, that wasn't like Mother. Remorse that the insurance money arrived too late to do Father any good. It helped Mother, though. Conferences with Johnny O'Shaughnessy about the investment of this money took her mind off her grief, and by and by she rallied and perked up, and let herself be persuaded to buy some new dresses and hats, only black ones, of course, maybe with just a touch of white lace or piqué, what do you think, Daughter Dear? But black having always been a good colour for her light-haired loveliness, people told her that she looked more charming than ever with the first strand of grey hair under the black velvet hat. People also began to say: "What's happening to Joy? Why, the girl is suddenly becoming a beauty. Well, she's the type that develops late, the better for her, that kind stays young longer." And Mother would wink and waggle a finger at her and ask archly: "Could perchance a certain young man have something to do with the glorious way you look, dear?"

This was the background: Joy was invited by Aunt Mathilda, and Fred was invited by Mother, and then Mother gave a tea party for Aunt Mathilda and Aunt Mathilda had them for supper in the venerable, musty old Browder house, and in the meantime Mother did very well on the stock market and money rolled in hand over fist, and Mathilda and Angelina became great friends and exchanged confident information about the status of the two young people in question. Joy's four thousand annually were mentioned, a

pleasant addition to a young economist's salary, and on the other hand it was pointed out that Aunt Hollenbeck in Beloit, who had brought up Fred, was not young and unfortunately failing in health and would leave a not inconsiderable estate to her nephew, and Mother said to Joy: "Soon I will be financially independent, thanks to Johnny, he's such a good friend and the tips he gave me were excellent, and if you'd like to go to Paris and do something about your painting, don't hesitate on account of me—not that I believe you'll paint any better in France than you do here! But as for me, I'm thinking of moving East and staying with Charles. After all, he is my son and I have neglected him much too long, but I couldn't leave your Father in his troubles, not even for a week or two, and I hope Charles will understand where my duty was. But now there is nothing more for me to do here, and being financially independent at last, I think a change might be good for my nerves; Dr. Bryant tells me I'm terribly run down, old Dr. Bryant, that is——"

It brought all of Joy's protective instincts for her brother up short and she said quickly: "No, thanks, Mother, that's very sweet of you, but just now I have no wish to go to Paris and it might not be such a good idea to upset Charles's routine just when he is studying for the finals——"

"Oh, I didn't say I'd move today or tomorrow, and," said the wagging finger, "maybe your silly mother can guess why you don't want to go to Paris 'just now'. I certainly will not leave you, dear, at a time when you may need me more than ever before. But a little bird tells me that it won't be long and you'll get married, and then my place is definitely with Charles."

Perish the thought! was Joy's reaction and the same evening she wrote Charley a warning letter and tried to lead Mother's newborn spirit of enterprise into other channels. The Girls, for instance, were planning a trip to Canada. But Canada was too cold for Mother, and Mexico too hot, and so she remained in San Francisco for the time being, and she and Aunt Mathilda hinted and pushed and shoved and winked, and were so unbearably benevolent and discreet that Joy and Fred felt badly fenced in by so much decorum and respectability around their wildflower love.

It was almost a relief that Fred did not stay put in San Francisco but that the research for his paper took him away for weeks and months; it made every return of his a festivity

and a great shining holiday, and kept them always renewed and fresh for each other.

What then? October '29, for Mother a disaster worse than earthquake, fire, and death. It changed everything. No more talk of financial independence, back to Joy's four thousand per annum. These were the weeks when Mother began dreading to be left alone, and if Aunt Mathilda had not released Joy from time to time, she would never have been able to meet Fred at the Japanese Tea Garden again, nor to walk with him through the rain. Eager as Mother had been before to see Joy married and live apart from her, now she clutched her frantically. The fear, the choking fear grew with the years, that parasitic fear that was eating Mother's life hollow, and Joy's too.

"Mum, you little psycho, why don't you do something about that silly phobia of yours?" Susan had asked once, with the best of intentions. "Why don't you see Dr. Behrman about it? You're making life a torture for yourself—not to mention what it does to Joy; I bet a good psychiatrist could talk you out of this wretched nonsense in a few seconds."

Mother had disliked Susan from the first, but since then she had hated and despised her harmless, bright, casually good-natured daughter-in-law. "That hussy, that tramp, trying to have me put away in an institution, eh? But I'll show her, just wait and see, I'll show her——"

And that, ladies and gentlemen, thought Joy, that well-meant sensible little remark of Susan's was probably the seed from which this poisoned night has grown. . . .

Charley's design for a prefabricated five-room house had won second prize in a contest, and while Mother was at last Proud again, she was also bewailing the fact that she hadn't seen her son in ages and it would simply kill her to miss his graduation at Princeton. It was at this point that the Frankel, Mrs., came to their relief. They were Jews but nice, as Mother used to say, and kindhearted Irma Frankel invited Mother to drive East with them in their Studebaker; moreover, the Frankels dug up a convenient cousin who had twins and was willing to pay Joy a hundred dollars for a portrait of them. Joy did it in rosebud pink and baby blue and with every hair in place and gleaming lights in the babies' eyes; it enabled her to supply Mother with two hundred dollars for incidental expenses, ship her off, and buy herself two weeks of freedom. "Fred, my darling, I felt like puking every minute of those

sittings; but now we have two whole weeks to steal us a premature sort of honeymoon, two whole, long weeks."

"Good. I made our reservations in Pismo Beach, it's nice and inexpensive, just the place where we can be sure not to meet anyone who knows us," answered Fred, surprising Joy once more by his forethought and practical sense.

When Mother came back she seemed a little smaller than before the trip and there were a few new, tiny wrinkles in her tissue-paper skin, and the enthusiastic descriptions of her visit with Charley had thin, brittle overtones.

"He's a wonderful boy, and he has a great future, there's no doubt about it. All doors are open for him, depression or not. I saw with my own eyes the offer the Metropolitan Construction Company made him. And Grover Aldenslow told me in person that he would love to have him on his staff of draughtsmen. You know who Grover is, he's been building all those smart new colonial homes for the rich Westchester crowd. We were invited to one of them over the week-end, at the Blunts', the sugar Blunts, you know. That house must have cost them a cool hundred thousand if it cost them a nickel—and you know what? I have an inkling that the younger Blunt girl has quite a crush on Charles, lovely girl, and what a young architect couldn't do with that Blunt capital to back him up, but . . ."

"Yes, Mother?" Joy had been waiting for the detrimental *but*.

"But Charles can be even more obstinate than his father was, bless his soul. And sort of closemouthed. Sort of all wrapped up in himself—well, I guess that's how young people are. He's full of ideas, but he had no time to tell me much about them. You should see the fuss people make about him, though. I was really Proud of him and, you know, I believe he was a little proud of his silly old mother too. What do you think of that new outfit of mine, by the way? Bergdorf Goodman's, a bargain, it looks twice what I paid for it. Charles seemed a bit preoccupied, I hope he doesn't overwork himself. I hate to say this, but he seems just a trifle egocentric, a trifle selfish—well," with a tight little laugh, "gifted people usually are—"

Mother was dreaming away, about the Sugar Blunt capital probably, and then she gave a sliver of her attention to Joy. "And what have you been up to while I was East, Daughter?"

"I? Oh—I tried to sketch a few landscapes. Carmel—Big Sur—Pismo Beach . . ."

Pismo Beach. A small, fogbound, clam-digging fishing village. But to Joy a blinding happiness and fulfilment crammed into two weeks; a thimbleful out of a bottomless well that would soon be theirs. The sun, the sand, the waves, the surf pounding its eternal rhythm into their nights; the days filled with play and laughter and colours; the scent of kelp and drying nets and fish, mixed with the oil and turpentine smells of Fred's portrait. Their long-legged, companionable bodies, hungry and then lost in each other, and afterwards content and relaxed and tired, and always and miraculously hungry again. There were sounds in Joy's throat she had never known, little bird's cries of ecstasy, muttered words out of jungle-dark dreams. There were colours she had never known existed, fifty different shades in a single luminous, sun-soaked drift of morning fog. Patterns of sandpipers' feet in the wet morning sands—like a drawing by Paul Klee. Pattern of white walls, tomato-red tile roof, square and triangle, balanced by the free-flowing contour of a boat resting keel-up on the shore. To paint all this, oh, to be free and capable and dare to paint what she saw in those two weeks—

What a commonplace thing, two people in love, the most commonplace thing in the world, Joy thought. How ridiculous if you looked back on it, how insignificant, how sticky. Two animals of the species *homo non sapiens* (as Father had called them), mating. That was all it amounted to, and so much fuss about it. Shakespeare's sonnets and Schubert's *Lieder* and Botticelli's *Venus* and his *Angels* and *Madonnas*, all of them sweetly pouting and petulant and a bit pink-nosed, like Mother after a good cry—all the inspiration and the glory and the heartbreak about almost nothing, that yet seemed at times like everything. And this is where the long trail ends. Waiting at the station in Tokema, all alone, and slowly going insane.

She took her hand from the dog's pelt to roll herself another cigarette. The rain had stopped as abruptly as it had begun and there was only the heavy drip-drip from the eaves. Tokema, of all places. She got up from the cold hard bench and stopped in front of the blackboard that was hanging there with the chalked-on numbers of trains to pass through. Yet she did not see that board in front of her, she was staring through it into the past, into the living-room of their Greenwich Street apartment, the same apartment they still had.

Pumped full with a new, buoyant selfishness, she had returned from Pismo Beach; she felt like a great shining sail as she cut into the murky doldrums of that room.

"Are you tired, Mother? Or is it all right if Fred drops in a bit later? We want to tell you something," she said, clasping her hands behind her back as Father had done in taut moments.

"Fred? You mean Mr. Hollenbeck? Is it that urgent?"

"To us—yes. We want to get married as soon as possible."

"Goodness, Daughter—you're not even engaged!"

"Let's skip the formalities, they're out of date. Fred doesn't want to start the fall term with rice in his cuffs and a clatter of tin cans and 'newly married' written all over us. We want to come to the campus as a settled dignified married couple of long standing."

"You mean he got the appointment at Stanford? Well—that's good news."

"No, but they offered him an associate professorship at Redlands College. It's as good a beginning as any and we've waited long enough."

Mother said nothing for a very long minute and then she said, "Redlands!" sotto voce and to herself, "Redlands——" as if she had seen an appalling apparition walk through the room. "Does Redlands at least pay him well?" she then asked soberly.

"I don't think so, but we'll get a little house on the campus rent-free and—what's the matter, Mother? Aren't you pleased that you won't have an old maid on your hands, after all?"

In the East they had blue'd Mother's grey hair a trifle too much and persuaded her to use an orange lipstick; where the painted cupid's bow did not quite cover her lips, they, too, had suddenly a bluish tinge and the rouge stood in hard circles on her white cheeks.

"What's there to be pleased about? The moment I turn my back you do something completely crazy—and without so much as asking me. Redlands! I wouldn't have minded so much moving to Stanford with you, at least I'd have some of my friends near, and I might meet nice people of the Peninsula crowd and run up to San Francisco every week—but Redlands! Where I don't know a soul—and certainly wouldn't care to know anybody. Honestly, Daughter, can you imagine me sitting on the shabby porch of a shabby little bungalow in Faculty Row? And in Redlands, of all the

Godforsaken small towns. That's somewhere near Los Angeles, isn't it? No, I refuse to live in Redlands——"

It was a storm of the first order, pathetic and quite ridiculous, considering that neither Fred nor Joy had even remotely thought of taking Mother to Redlands with them—nor anywhere else, for that matter. "Don't let's be emotional about this question, let's take a rational point of view," he had declared. "Your mother has her life and we want to have ours, and there exists no infernally worse dissonance in the whole universe than the squeak of the rocking-chair on which a mother-in-law is planted for the rest of her days. Don't misunderstand me, darling, nothing personal. I'm very fond of your mother, but it would not work out, and she'd be just as miserable as we. She can't live alone? Well, that's too bad, it's a weakness, and you must not cater to it. It's the weak who, indestructible themselves, destroy the strong if we don't stop them. The termite—the amoeba—the mosquito—germs—bugs—pests——"

"Yes, yes, darling, you don't have to give me a lecture on it. You better tell me what the heck we're going to do about Mother."

"The solution is as logical as two and two—your Mother and my Aunt Mathilda have become great friends, and there's that huge stable, that old Browder home on Lombard Street, where Aunt Mathilda is rattling around all by herself. If your mother can't live alone, let the two old girls move in together and keep each other company and gossip to their hearts' content—it'll be comfortable, and economical besides——"

"If you think that's a simple solution, you try and talk Mother into it and see if she doesn't bite your head off," Joy said glumly. Fred marched into the living-room and talked for twenty minutes with Mother, after which he emerged with his wide, winning Wisconsin grin.

"All fixed," he announced calmly. "Come in and receive the maternal blessings."

"Well, I'll be——" Joy said, dumbfounded. "How did you do it?"

"If it isn't my fatal charm, I can only assume that sense makes sense; and your mother is not only charming, but she has a surprisingly good head for figures," was Fred's conclusion.

Mother's head was bowed over some sheets which Fred had covered with the mentioned figures, her hands trembled

faintly, and she was trying to smile and hide the tears that slowly ran down to her mouth and washed the orange lipstick away. Seldom had Joy seen Mother so pliant and forlorn, and she felt touched and very sorry for her. "I mapped out the family budget, ours and Angelina's," Fred announced cheerfully. He was already calling her Angelina and she was calling him Fred and everything seemed in the best of order. "We'll have to hew very close to the line, but it'll work out——"

"If it's a question of money—you can have my four thousand, Mother. We'll manage on Fred's salary," Joy said spontaneously.

Fred's face expressed: Watch out—too emotional again. "No, Joy, that's what I just explained to Angelina. It wouldn't be fair. Not the first year, when we have to establish a household—and there might be a baby, we hope. Later it'll be different. I won't be an underpaid associate professor for long, you may be sure of that, but for the beginning Angelina agrees with me, that it's only fair if you share your income with her and share alike. Now, here you can see how it works out in detail——"

Joy was amazed, as she always was by the unexpected flashes of Fred's efficiency. He hadn't forgotten a thing, down to the New Year's tips for the janitor and the replacement of electric bulbs. "I'll try to form some sort of a co-operative on the campus, because you see, for instance, if we buy potatoes by the bushel we'll save quite a lot, and the same holds for eggs and everything——"

Darling, darling, don't go so far away from me, Joy thought. Fred, checking off the laundry bill and thoroughly conversant with egg prices, was not quite the same as the romantic Fred of the Japanese Tea Garden, the passionate lover of Pismo Beach. Yet laundry bills and egg prices were a solid part of marriage—of what to her meant: Always. There was a stability about this sober and efficient man of hers which she had never known. And that he had been able to tame Mother seemed a piece of sheer magic.

For a few days Mother seemed quite happy, quite reconciled to the idea of moving Grandmère's antique furniture to Aunt Mathilda's musty house. "Why, I'll make a sight-seeing place of it—Old San Francisco at its best," she announced, and Joy thought that Mother would probably enjoy the idea of having found in timid, quiet Aunt Mathilda the utterly elegant appendage called a lady companion—like, for

, instance, stone-old Mrs. Bensinger had at her beck and call. But after a few days Mother's mood changed. She seemed thoughtful, subdued, unusually considerate towards Joy, who couldn't help feeling a bit guilty and very sorry for her. "What's worrying you, Mother Dear? I thought you liked moving in with Aunt Mathilda—and she's so happy about it, the sweet old girl."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about myself, I never do, Daughter. It's you I'm worrying about. I haven't slept all these nights, I've tried to make up my mind whether to talk to you or let things take their course. But you know me—I've never shunned doing my duty, hard as it sometimes might have been. Come, sit down, there's something I have to discuss with you, and I'm afraid it'll hurt you a bit. Not as much as it hurts me, though, because you know how much I love you, more than if you were my own child, you know that, don't you?"

"Yes, yes, Mother, I know, but come to the point, you've built up enough suspense for a five-act drama——"

"Don't misunderstand me, Daughter. I'm very fond of your young man, he's a fine boy and he comes from a good, sound family——"

"Thanks. And?"

"It's very unfortunate, but you can't honestly say the same of yourself, dear. You must forgive me if I break this to you rather rudely."

"Never mind, Mother. Let the skeleton out of the closet. Did one of the early Ballards pick up his wife in a Tenderloin crib? We wouldn't be the only San Francisco family with a purple patch in its past, and neither Fred nor I care a hoot about it."

"You don't have to get vulgar and make fun of me. It's a much too serious matter. I'm talking about your health."

"What's the matter with my health? You always told me that I have the constitution of a dray horse. Oh, I see—you mean because Maud's lungs were not quite sound?"

"That's not it. Thank heavens, I've kept you healthy up to now, physically, I mean, and let's hope you'll remain just as healthy when you're married and have a family—you do want children, don't you? Young people today seem to discuss such delicate matters quite freely, I was told——"

"You bet we want children. Half a dozen, if we can afford it."

"Hm. Now look, Daughter, maybe it was wrong of me not

to have discussed this with you sooner, but I was afraid it would upset you too much and—well, there it is: you come from a sick family. On the Ambros side. We Ballards were always sound of mind and limb——”

“Go on.”

“There has been a strain of mental disease in the Ambros family for several generations. Insanity. They’re unbalanced. Decadent. Degenerated—do you understand what I’m trying to tell you? My dear—you oughtn’t to have children. I’m not even certain that you ought to get married.”

Joy felt her hands grow cold and clasped them behind her back. “That’s nonsense,” she said with a stiff, unbelieving smile.

“It’s the truth, though. Sometimes it skips a generation and then it breaks through when you least expect it. Remember your father—his rash tempers—those periods of melancholy when he hardly spoke a word, those moods of his, up in the sky and then way down—certainly, he wasn’t exactly what you’d call well balanced——”

“Father was—oh, please, don’t let’s discuss Father.”

“Believe me, I knew your father better than you; I covered up for him a whole lifetime, I didn’t let anyone know what was the matter with him, but I knew. Oh yes, I knew it. And the way he died—we never talked about it but——”

“Please, Mother, please, don’t let’s talk about it now. Don’t let’s talk about it—ever.”

“And what about Grandmère? You couldn’t call the Generalin normal. Not by any stretch of imagination, you couldn’t.”

“Grandmère was an eccentric,” said Joy.

“She was plain nuts,” said Mother Dear, falling into the vernacular but instantly climbing out of it. “A manic depressive with distinct megalomaniac delusions, that’s what Dr. Behrman wrote in his report, and he is one of the most famous psychiatrists that ever came from Budapest. I never mentioned your Grandmère’s brother, the Count Ammering, but I met him when I was a young girl; completely mad, they had to put him into an institution. One of your father’s sisters went out of her mind after childbirth and has been a burden to her husband ever since—but don’t let’s go into detail. I’ve never heard of so much hereditary disease in a family.”

“If you knew all this, why then did you marry Father?” Joy asked truculently. “Why did Maud?”

"Maud didn't know and wouldn't have understood it anyway. And I—I loved your father, and I loved you and you needed a mother. I don't mean to say that I sacrificed myself for your sake—but anyway—I loved you and your father enough to take that risk with open eyes. Thank heavens, it turned out well, and Charles is a real Ballard; good sound pioneer stock, he reminds me often of my own father, bless his soul. But you are leaning more and more towards the Ambros side, dear, and I can't tell you how much I have worried about it without letting you know. But now that you want to get married and have a family—oh, nothing untoward may happen, but it's no use closing your eyes to the possibility. If you want my opinion, the least you can do is tell Fred the truth and let him decide. If he feels that he loves you enough to take the chance, at least he'll do so with open eyes—as I did when I married your father. My poor girl, I know it's hard, but it's the only decent thing to do." She got up and stood over Joy and stroked the unruly hair back from Joy's wide brow; it was an unwanted caress which sent a cool little shiver up from the nape of Joy's neck and made her scalp contract. "If you think it's too hard for you, I'll take it upon myself to talk to him," Mother offered gently.

"Thanks, Mother. That won't be necessary. I'm a bit muddled up just now. Let me think it over. Thanks for telling me anyway."

She had gone to her room with that injection of poison slowly spreading out and infiltrating every cell of her brain; a small dose of poison only, a poison with delayed action and lasting effect. She had consulted the eminent Dr. Behrman, who shrugged and probed and talked to her from behind a barricade of Freudian terms and at last discharged her with some vague sort of pessimistic optimism.

"... not being thoroughly acquainted with the case histories of other members of your family, I hesitate to give an opinion—of course, we can't foresee in what way inherited traits might manifest themselves—on the other hand, environment and early impressions have such a great influence—at present I think it is safe to say that you seem well adjusted and stable, Miss Ambros, but we are no magicians or soothsayers, Miss Ambros, and—yes, it is true, your grandmother had lost touch with reality to a remarkable degree, but having met her only when she was very old, I cannot judge if this was simply a symptom of senile degeneration, or if she had always

been a schizoid—not to say a schizophrenic personality. Your father—yes, he was my patient during a nervous breakdown—but that's a passing disturbance, and we know that it hits not too infrequently the solid citizen just as well—the level-headed banker, the stout-hearted sportsman, ha-ha-ha. As matters stand, I can neither advise you not to marry, nor would I like to take the responsibility of telling you to go ahead, bring children into the world—in any case, I'd like to have another talk with you, Miss Ambros. Shall we say Wednesday? At three-fifteen? *Auf Wiedersehen*, Miss Ambros. I assure you, it was a pleasure——”

Thin ice, that's what it amounted to, stripped of its psychiatric mumbo jumbo.

Joy tried to push clouds away and struggled through gloom and fog, and could not sleep and searched her conscience and fought for the clarification of the slippery and evasive problem. The third day she took a long hike way out along the shore. She climbed down the cliffs and there she sat for a long time, her hands clasped around her knees, and thought it over. But soon her eyes began to absorb and transform things. There was more seeing than thinking and a great healing power in it. On some days the fog of San Francisco could be as good as and better than the much-painted one of Paris. Behind its transparency stretched the Pacific and shone the stronger sun of California. It was a more expensive fog, platinum, as against the Paris silver, but this wasn't one of those days. It was cold though not windy, at least not according to San Francisco standards, and sky, shore, rocks, sea, and the clouds over Marin County, had more shades of grey than any brush could paint. The water in the tiny coves of the shore line was almost black, a fine background for the Braque browns of fuzzy, floating coconut shells, the long and highly attractive garlands of kelp the tide had deposited on the sands. Five shades of green on their browns, orange high lights on the roundness of gourdlike fruit, blossoms, or whatever they were. The cliffs too, if you looked at them long enough, were not grey, but fanned out into a spectrum of colours, strong blues, purple, some ochre, cubistic shapes contoured in white lines by the veiled platinum sun. Before she left, Joy picked up a flat pebble into which the water had chiselled a smooth oval hole; it was a lovely pebble, conceived and shaped by a very great and ageless sculptor. She put it into her coat pocket, keeping her fingers tightly closed around

its beautiful form. She felt fine, thank you. She felt cleansed and washed free of that slow poison—or so she believed.

"I thought it over, Mother, what you told me the other day, you remember?"

"Well—and . . .?"

"I'm not going to talk to Fred about it. I discussed the matter with that sly old voodoo priest, Dr. Behrman, and I don't see any reason for blowing it up and making a big problem of it. I'm not afraid."

Mother looked up from the sweater she had begun knitting when Charles had entered Princeton and which hadn't been quite ready for his graduation. "Except," she said with a little smile, when Joy had reached the door.

"What's that?"

"Not afraid, except of finding out that your young man might not love you enough to stand a test," said Mother.

Trust Mother always to hit the raw, jumping nerve. That was the funny thing about Mother. You wouldn't call her especially bright, or well informed, and the bit of cosmopolitan veneer which in the years with Father she had managed to lacquer over her native ignorance was exceedingly thin. In general she was much too self-centred to understand or care what went on in other people's minds or hearts, yet she had an uncanny instinct for finding the vulnerable spot where best to inflict a sharp pain or a lasting damage.

Smarting from the sting of the whip, Joy cantered off to have it out with her man. "Tell me, Fred, but honestly, did it ever strike you that I'm kind of nervous? Moody? Unbalanced—or something of the sort?" she asked him over a cup of tea in their graceful old retreat, the Japanese Garden. The little spoon in her anxious fingers hit the saucer with the fine trembling of a silver baby rattle.

Fred only laughed. "Sure, honey, as nervous as the old redwood in Sequoia. Emotional, yes, and silly, thank God, and unpredictable, but that's what made me fall in love with you at first sight. Such a reserved young lady on the outside, so much of a woman once you open up. I love banked fires. They're much warmer——"

"You don't think I'm a bit crazy at times?"

"You must be or you wouldn't have picked me of all people. But never mind, I'll be sensible for both of us when it's necessary."

Joy took a new run and jump. "Fred darling—I mean—

later, when we're married—what would you do if I fell sick—or supposing a child of ours should be—I mean—if——”

“I know what you mean. If I broke a leg, you'd run off with the butcher boy, sure as hell, wouldn't you? And if you get appendicitis, I'll turn round and start an affair with Marlene Dietrich, and if our brats catch the measles, as they certainly will, I'll desert you altogether and you'll never see hide nor hair of me——”

“I'm serious, Fred. I——”

“So am I, my Joy. We both know the meaning of marriage; for richer, for poorer, in sickness, in health. I won't take my vows lightly, and neither will you, and now stop talking rubbish.”

Joy gave up, she did not tell him the whole truth. She tried to push the whole thing out of her mind as probably just another of Mother's ingenious little monkey wrenches which she was fond of throwing into any smoothly working machinery. It was only much later, when everything was over and finished, and the poison had taken its full effect, that she asked Mother if she had secretly taken matters in her own hands and frightened Fred Hollenbeck off.

Mother denied with strong cries of protest, but that didn't mean a thing, Joy knew. To Mother, lying and play-acting were as natural as breathing, sleeping, and digesting were to others.

Frederic O. Hollenbeck, successful trouble shooter, bowed out of Joy's life like a gentleman. A hasty good-bye over the telephone, a wire from Beloit, Wisconsin: Aunt Hollenbeck very ill—must remain at her bedside. Love. An evasive letter, a vague telegram from New York, and on her birthday flowers, and even a long-distance call, hasty, garbled, without substance, and choked by her own heartbeat. A clean amputation would have been less painful than this gangrenous rotting away of her only love affair. He didn't come back to San Francisco and he didn't go to Redlands either. A letter from London informed her that he had accepted a fellowship which was to keep him in Europe and South America on a two years' research project.

For a while there were still letters, ever shorter ones at ever longer intervals, and then still a post card from some port or capital, and at last they, too, stopped altogether. What remained to her of the Fred Hollenbeck episode was in the end nothing but an unfinished and quite mediocre portrait

and the undeniable advantage of being an old maid in name only.

Joy did not know exactly at what point she had stopped being fond of Mother and begun hating her. There was no such clear-cut hiatus in her twilight life, it all became drifting, wafting, like the fog over the bay, without lights or shadows, without contour or substance, an ever-sameness in which the years passed quickly, for empty days or weeks or months are very brief. Joy had been very fond of Mother, and then just fond by habit, and later she was still grateful and under an obligation, and even when she began to see through Mother's manoeuvres and behind her steel mask of feeble helplessness, she had been leniently amused, as we may be by the failings of people we have always and closely known. And for a long time, even after Father's death, and after Fred's disappearing act, she still sometimes felt sorry for Mother, whose fretting and fidgeting grew worse, and who at last could not be left alone for an hour without suffering agonies of fear and suffocation. Little by little Joy had added up all the harm Mother had done and had begun hating her. But by then she herself was too worn down and undermined to break away and leave Mother to her own devices. If I leave Mother, she will descend upon Charley, she thought, with whatever energy was still left in her. She will ruin him and break him and I can't let that happen, not to Charley. I myself don't matter, not any longer. But Charley does, he matters a great deal.

And so, disdainfully loathing, grimly polite, Joy kept on taking care of Mother, who had injected that slow poison into her mind, that carrier of disintegration, that sickening watchfulness: Am I normal? Do I behave like other people? I have changed. I am changing for the worse, it is all getting so cloudy. And could this bitterness and hatred be of a paranoiac nature? Do I have distorted views of the world? These colours and shades I see, this urge to find the well-ordered pattern behind the accidentally visible, the thing within the thing—is this the beginning of losing touch with reality? Van Gogh—the flame-like strokes of his brush, the searing reds and yellows and almost black greens of his palette, the turbulence of his dancing stars, the magnificent, sweeping, darkling menace of his cypresses: it all had ended in insanity. But this was how she, too, saw what she saw, these were her colours, this was how she would have wished to paint had she become a painter.

Did it mean that she, too, was heading for the insane asylum?

She would stand in the kitchen and coddle an egg for Mother and suddenly she would laugh out loud. But I wouldn't cut off my own ear like Vincent. I would cut off Mother's and send it to the next brothel with Mrs. Ambros' best compliments—and she heard her own laughter and stopped abruptly, shocked and appalled.

Once and only once did she speak about it with Larry Grant; not with her brother Charley, because she did not wish to intrude her own troubled thoughts and currents of anxiety into his life, which was round and perfect and complete like the beautiful cone shells Susan was collecting for Larry as samples of colour and design. No, you couldn't go to your brother, a man secure and happy in his clear bright world of glass and new building materials and redwood and functional structure and tomorrow's freedom of lines and ideas, and ask him point-blank: "Do you think I'm slowly going crazy? It runs in our family, you know. . . ."

But with Larry Grant you could talk about many things, about everything almost; even about your own slipping, locked-in self.

Larry had come to San Francisco with Charles Ambros, both of them part and parcel of the group of modern architects and designers which the preparations for the World's Fair swept into town and who were forging ahead with great gusto: turning visions into blueprints and blueprints into buildings, and altogether letting the Bay City have one of those badly needed blood transfusions which she endured from time to time with reluctance and bewilderment, till she had absorbed the new blood as something to be proud and even a bit boastful about. By now, two miraculous bridges spanned the bay, a fairground had been created on Treasure Island, but ferryboats and cable cars, although obsolete, were strenuously preserved by a sentimentally commercial population which was as fond of quaint relics as of the tourist trade they attracted. Once more the same old complaint was sounded, on the streets, in clubs, downtown offices, and staid, ornate living-rooms along the Marina: "San Francisco isn't what it used to be. You should have seen the city before the World War. . . ."

In the meantime the three young people put up their work shack, tacked to the walls their dreams in the shape of

beautifully conceived but highly unrealistic projects for city planning, for new suburbs, schools, factories, exemplary housing facilities for workers, with playgrounds and tree-shaded curving streets and sun and comfort for all; and this done, they got busy. Charley was whistling. Larry was smoking his pipe, and Susan was pregnant as hell.

The three of them had arrived in a disreputable car; they seemed inseparable, and their crisp gaiety and total unconcern for what people might think about such a triangle made Mother's lips turn blue under the lipstick. But for all the domestic trials and tribulations that were added to Joy's troubles, for all the soft, gentle tantrums Mother was throwing since Charley had committed the crime of marrying the girl he loved instead of falling in with Mother's fine-spun, ambitious plans, Joy's life had grown much easier, richer, lighter, less burdened, less confined, since her brother was back in town. Susan and Larry became her friends at once, particularly Larry. With him she could feel at ease, relaxed, gay, and even exuberant at times. He made her laugh as she hadn't since—oh well, not in all the years since Anno Domini Hollenbeck. Some of the refreshing draught even blew through the apartment on Greenwich Street. The furniture had to be rearranged when Mother sold Grandmère's baroque commode. Susan hung new curtains in Mother's bedroom, and Charley threw out some of the old, stiff-backed chairs and replaced them with comfortable modern ones, designed by Larry Grant.

"Larry is a genius when it comes to chairs," Charley pronounced. "They fit you, they hug you, they love you, they don't put your fanny in a straitjacket. You sit in them, that's the secret. It's the one gift this great lug has got: he can design a chair that's a chair."

"Larry has another gift too. He's a friend that's a friend, now aren't you, Granty?" Susan added with a little twinkle at Larry, who, pipe in mouth, was in the process of changing Maxine's diaper. He was a lumbering elephantine kind of a man and, like the elephant at the zoo, he held a great attraction for all sorts of people, especially children. His enormous body was covered rather than dressed in billowing masses of grey flannel cut on the lines of a badly rigged tent; he never used an overcoat but sat warm and safe within his paddings of fat and muscles.

"Look at your hat, you sloppy bastard," Susan would

say affectionately. "What do you do—sleep with it?"

"On it, dearest, on it, not with it. If you must know, I put it under my mattress at night to keep it well pressed like a floor-walker's pants. In fact it's a trick I learned when I was a floor-walker at the Palace Emporium, Duluth, Minnesota. You have to have winning manners and a dapper appearance in that sort of job." His passing references to an improbable number of vastly divergent jobs he claimed to have held at various times made Joy wonder and almost giggle.

"Don't believe a word that big bruiser says," Charley would remark. "It's all part of his act."

"Aw, go and tuck in your shirt-tail, brother! You're just jealous of my broad education," Larry would answer, looking with a mother's tender eye at his young partner. Yet for all of Larry's careless ways of talking, walking, dressing, and behaving, there were unexpected high lights of elegance about him. "I could earn good money renting out that lug as a lady's escort," Susan claimed; he was a light-footed, tireless, and enthusiastic dancer, and his smooth expertness in ordering a dinner and discussing an enjoyable vintage gained him the respect and favour of arrogantly harassed headwaiters and disillusioned sommeliers. "You can't help that sort of stuff if you work as a dining-room steward on a Dollar Liner," was Larry's explanation. He doodled designs for dresses—"did oodles of doodles for *Vogue* in my lean years"—and liked to go along on shopping trips; he never grew impatient at drawn-out fittings, gave sound advice, and never missed complimenting you on a new hat or accessory. It was a quality which promoted him quickly into Mother's good graces, "Just don't let her find out that I laid the foundations for my exquisite taste in feminine apparel when, as a boy, I ran errands for the girls in a cathouse, down on Water Street, Memphis, Tennessee," observed Larry. "What a clown you are, Larry!" Susan would exclaim, at which he turned quite serious. "You mustn't overrate me, honey-chile—not a clown, definitely not a clown! Only a roustabout with Ringling Brothers and only for six weeks; got fired when the elephants complained that I was eating all their peanuts."

Larry's usefulness was a blanket that covered everything: he had good seats to sold-out concerts; he brought you the book you ought to read, took you to exhibitions you mustn't miss, kid, and drove you out to the country when your nerves had almost reached the breaking point. He could cook, sew

on buttons, fix a jammed zipper, repair electric gadgets, bring Mother's dying birthday azalea back to life. He paced the floor of the maternity ward with Charley and later watched the babies, numbers one and two; he didn't mind in a pinch helping Susan with the laundry or taking Mother off Joy's hands for an evening, and he was an expert bottle warmer and Pablum feeder. He always seemed to have time, never appeared hurried or preoccupied or tired; almost as if he wished to make you forget that he was one of America's topmost industrial designers and a glutton for work. "How do you keep it up, you bum? Living on a diet of benzedrine?" Charley, by no means an easily fatigued worker, would ask, dim-eyed and yawning over some construction problem late at night.

"A simple matter of habit, son. Since the time I was a night watchman at the Sourkamp Tool and Tractor Plant, Wichita, Kansas, I've never been able to sleep more than five hours out of twenty-four. It leaves me lots of time for fun," Larry would answer.

"Larry really is God's gift to womanhood," Susan said to Joy. "Did you notice that all the cleaning women worship him? The girls at the office are pinning their hearts on their sleeves for him, and those genteel old salesladies at the White House who wait on him forget that their feet hurt. He'd make a she-tiger eat out of his hand, my fat Ganesha."

"Your what?"

"It's my personal nickname for him, all rights reserved. It's that Hindu elephant god. I found it in one of Larry's learned books."

"Apropos . . ." said Joy. "Don't forget the hit he made with Mother Dear. If we don't watch out, she'll plant her little flag on his shores and declare him her own territory."

"Oh no, she won't. That would be the point where I would get up on my hind legs and fight," Susan said with more heat than was usual with her; Joy threw a covert and surprised glance at her sister-in-law, and something in the back of her mind stirred faintly, wondering if perhaps the suspicions and aspersions The Girls and Mother were casting in that direction might not be entirely ridiculous. "I'll be damned if I let Mother put her hands on him," Susan said. "I was there first, see. Mother may be possessive as all hell, but so am I when it comes to Larry. Or to Charley," she added as an afterthought.

Joy never learned whether it came to a tiff between Mother and Susan on account of Larry Grant. But one nice day Mother declared that she did not want to see that unappetizing fat fellow—what was his name?—that repulsive man Susan seemed to be just a trifle too fond of?—ah yes, that Mr. Grant—ever again in her apartment.

"But, Mother, he's such a good friend of us all—and I'm sure you liked him too," said Joy. "Why don't you want to see him any more?"

"Why? Because!" Mother said, and was not a day older than fifteen.

"What did you do to my mother, you objectionable scoundrel?" Charley asked Larry, who was sketching something with his right hand while feeding squash into baby Florian with his left. "She hates you, hates you, hates you. And it's all so sudden, dear."

"Does she? Good. She was crying on my shoulder about how lonely she was and that no one really cared for her, and she also indicated that I reminded her of a gentleman by the name of Hopper."

"Who's Hopper?" Charley asked.

"Her first husband. He died in Brazil. He was big—but not as fat as you, Larry," Joy contributed. "I remember Uncle Hopper. I loved him."

"Anyway—I tried to explain a few simple facts of life to Mother Dear. 'Mother Dear,' I told her, 'selfish people are always lonely and dissatisfied. It's their very selfishness that creates a vacuum around them, and you, my adorable darling,' I said, 'are in all innocence the most selfish little bitch I've come across in my life.' She took it very hard, I'd say. In fact I'd say that she threw me out of her apartment."

"I'm glad she did," Susan said spiritedly. "I don't like her meddling and I don't wish to come into the ludicrous position of competing with my mother-in-law for the affection of The Man I Love."

It was all farce and josh and exaggeration, and yet not quite funny, Joy thought. She could not even smile about it. "It's late. I have to go home," she said. It was Thursday afternoon, when The Girls at the Thursday Afternoon Society relieved her for a few hours from watching over Mother. Only since Larry had entered her life did she realize how tightly her schedule was designed, how confining her prison. That was how she thought of her life at Mother's side—

sometimes as a prison, sometimes as an endless, shadeless road on which she was dragged along in bondage. She had even tried to paint the tortured monotony of that road, but it hadn't come off. The truth was that during the last years she had given up painting entirely. But with Larry Grant's coming, this road, this barren landscape of her life, had changed.

"Tell me, kid," Larry suddenly said, out of a silence, as he was driving her home through the falling dusk. "You never talk about your father. Neither does Charley. What sort of a man was he?"

"I don't know. I guess I was too fond of him to try to analyse him. He was—you know—he was a stranger."

"A stranger? To you? No? How then? In his time? In his place? In his marriage?"

"No—I mean: just a stranger. Everywhere, at any time. Impractical, a dreamer, an idealist, romantic, out of place, incapable of hurting anyone——"

"Weak maybe?"

"Maybe. At least that's what he said about himself. I think, though, that Mother broke his backbone. There was a strange sort of bondage between them——"

"Not so strange, kid. But even Mother Dear couldn't have broken him if he had been strong. She didn't break Charley."

"That's right. But look, Larry: there was her first husband, Uncle Hopper. He was a strong man, he was practical, a realist, a man's man, he was the exact opposite of Father. And she broke him too. At least I believe she did. Well, here we are—put me down at the corner. I don't like Mother to peep at us from the kitchen window. Good night, Larry. Thanks for taking me home. And for everything."

"Listen, kid: I don't quite think that Mother Dear is as funny as we make her out to be. But I tell you one thing: the day she tries to break any bone of Charley's or Susan's or yours—that very day I will drop a pinch of cyanide into her night cup and gladly. Good night, kid, sleep well, see you on Wednesday."

At first she only looked forward to seeing him once or twice a week or at least talking to him on the telephone; later a trace of impatience got mixed into that easy well-being she felt in his company; she wanted more of him, she needed him—which was a bad sign. And finally he became indispensable to her. Any Larry-less day was hard to bear, and it was more by the tearing in her nerves when she did not see him

than by the pleasure his presence gave her that she began to realize how much he had come to mean to her. "Sometimes I miss you so much, Larry—sometimes I wonder if I am the call or the echo," she told him. With Larry you could take short cuts; he understood.

"Both, we're call and echo, kid, both of us, it's interchangeable. Last Wednesday for instance——"

"Yes? Last Wednesday——" Joy asked hungrily.

"When I couldn't get away from that awful session with the Junior Chamber of Commerce boys, I certainly was calling for you then, as loud as a moose in springtime—and I seemed to hear an ever so faint echo. It's give and take. I need you as much and maybe more than you might need me. Let's stick together, kid. Let's be good to each other."

Let's be good to each other. No fonder word could be spoken between lovers, between any two people. Let's be good to each other. Father might have said it——

In the beginning Larry Grant had been undeniably ugly. His large head, almost bald, the wide clown's mouth, the broken nose—"That's when I tried to break into the wrestling racket, Jamaica, Long Island"—the inappropriately expressive eyes bedded in fat—"Your friend might be a nice person, but he certainly is unattractive," she had told Charley *after their first introduction*.

"Never mind, you'll get used to him," was all Charley said. The longer and better she knew Larry the better-looking he seemed to become. He had nice ears, hadn't he, good teeth, and rather amazing hands. They were the hands of a great designer, intelligent, lively, small in proportion to his bulk, and without a trace of fat. The nervous hands of a different, sensitive, lonely Larry Grant whom only she learned to know. She would catch herself staring at those hands and wishing—she did not know for what. Until one day she woke up and discovered that Larry Grant had pushed the lean disembodied spectre of Fred Hollenbeck out of her dreams and put himself in his place. Great Lord, she thought, I didn't know it could still happen to me! Suddenly everything seemed clear and simple and inevitable. Let's be good to each other. Just that.

It was Wednesday again, they were sitting in their cheap little Italian restaurant, sawdust on the floor and paper garlands for a decoration, but the owner was Larry's friend and the chianti was good. It was the evening when Joy at last talked of herself, approaching with many detours the

fear Mother had implanted in her. "I don't know, Larry, I have been different from other girls as far back as I can remember—and—you see——"

Wednesday was her evening off, Mother's evening with the Charley's, on which she relentlessly insisted, in spite of her dislike for Susan. Larry, used to organizing his working crews and meeting delivery deadlines, had once and for all assigned Wednesdays as his evenings with Joy.

"What's the matter with me, Larry? Can you tell me?" she asked abruptly, just as she had asked her father long ago.

"I think I can. The trouble with you is that you have no unicorn in your garden."

"Should I have one?"

"Indeed you should. In fact everyone ought to have a unicorn in his garden; it's more important than a chicken in every pot or a car in every garage." It was one of their short cuts and needed no explanation.

"There was a time when I had a little herd of unicorns in my garden, not just one—but one by one they were killed off." Joy said wistfully.

"I know, kid. I was brought up by an omnivorous mother myself."

"Larry—there's something that often makes me sick with apprehension. Larry—do you think I am quite normal?"

"Well, I hope not. Nobody is quite normal. Normality is an arbitrary concept, and we know less about it than about the distance between planets or the deviation of light rays. You can't measure normality, because it's nothing absolute, it's only a convention. Every American is automatically considered a madman outside of the States, while a peasant from Czechoslovakia would be treated as a case of arrested development among our own second-graders. And in the Congo any man who can't be tom-tommed into a frenzy and a trance would be a freak. Now let me ask you something, kid: why did you give up painting? Charley told me that you had heaps of talent, and he usually knows what he's talking about."

"That's one of my dead little unicorns. Maybe I had a bit of talent—I don't know what happened to it. The termites got into it or something. At the time I studied I was afraid that my paintings were too crazy, and now that the moderns have gone way beyond me, I've become much too tame; timid. I—no, I can't paint any more. You know, my father had a German

book in his library, *Imagery of the Demented*—paintings and drawings collected in various insane asylums—well, there was everything in it, complete, with case histories of the inmates, from a completely withdrawn second-rate Klee to a splashing megalomaniacal pseudo-Miró. I—well, I am not certain enough of myself, such things frighten me a bit, I am not stable enough, I am trying hard to keep the pieces of myself together; it wouldn't do for me to let go and vomit colours on canvas, it's unhealthy, dangerous—”

“You know, kid, the way we're looking at paintings and art in general—that's all conditioned reflexes; we're all Pavlov's dogs, that's what makes fashions of five years ago so irresistibly funny. But fashions have nothing to do with the real thing in art, and very little with you. I can guess what ails you, kid. We've all become a bit sick with too much introspection at present, it makes us so damned important to ourselves; I, personally, have an idea that mental health begins, on the contrary, with being aware how unbelievably unimportant we are, how incredibly, infinitesimally small and uninteresting. Such an awareness frees an amazing amount of energy which may be put to better use. There's a border line between self-expression and self-indulgence, which too many people overstep just now. It makes the difference between good art and bad, or, to express myself a little less like Professor Wurtzefinger, the difference between a healthy digestion and a disgusting diarrhoea. You, my little problem child, seem, on the contrary, a bit constipated. Too much pent-up unreleased stuff in you, that's why I believe painting would do you good. I wish I could give you a little laxative in that direction.”

“But, Larry, that's just what I can't do any more. I tried—but it's all dried up and gone. You know: *il faut porter un soleil de mille rayons dans le ventre*—and in my belly there isn't enough fire left to light a kitchen match—oh, what's the use, Larry, a guy like you can't possibly understand what a torture it is to be sterile. Nothing left. Impotent.”

“Let's go,” Larry said abruptly. “Let's walk a few steps, the air will do us good. And forget Picasso's pronunciamientos and the suns in his belly. We are talking about you. You are not dead yet, kid, you're only buried.”

It stirred something up in her, it made her smile, absent-mindedly, and forget whatever she was doing, it made her listen to Mother without hearing her and it made her see

shapes and colours she had not seen, not wanted to see, for a long time. But Larry too seemed occupied with her problem and not willing to let go of it with some rather general remarks about the arts and mores of the present. "I have been thinking about you," he announced at their next Wednesday. "We'll have to do something about you, kid. Now tell me first, how old are you—and don't let's be coy about it."

"Practically ancient. Going on thirty-six. Why?"

"It's time you got married and had children. Or don't you want to?"

"I want to, very much; but I can't leave Mother and—and I haven't been asked, Larry."

"That's your own fault, kid, you're freezing them out: you're acting frigid—you aren't really, or are you?"

"If that's what's worrying you, the answer is no." She blushed and there was a little silence. "For that matter you aren't married either, and you're in your forties. You must have reasons too."

"That's a long story. Maybe someday I'll tell it to you. Maybe."

Why not now? thought Joy, and suddenly she knew the answer: Susan. Larry was Susan's property, she saw it clearly now—and why had she not seen it before? It explained everything, and Mother and The Girls were right, the commonplace was always right in the end. For the first time in her life Joy chewed on the acrid, burning taste of jealousy in her mouth.

"You aren't trying to be mysterious, Larry? Let me make a guess," she said, hoping that she smiled. "You are tied up with a girl you can't marry. A girl who is married? And for some reason doesn't want to leave her husband?"

He reached for her hand across the table and laughed. "I never thought you'd be as transparent as that, kid," he said, quite amused. "No, I'm not tied up with a married woman and her name isn't Susan and quit biting your finger or you'll get a hang-nail. I adore Susan and I think she is the loveliest thing on earth and I love her dearly. But I'm not 'in love' with her." He let go of her hand and searched in her face for the answer to an unasked question.

"Go on, Larry," she said, "you wanted to tell me something?"

"Look here, kid, I am a very rare specimen: a completely unattached man. I am not 'in love' with anybody and, as far

as I can remember, I have never been 'in love'—and what's more. I don't think I've missed much. I can hardly think of anything less important in today's world than Love with a capital L. Except that it has a considerable commercial value; it's the cloth from which people cut their movies and hit songs and the stuff crooners croon and writers write about. Lots of people make their livings by it, not to mention Love's importance for the liquor, car, cosmetics, and garment industries."

"Well—I guess that's telling me——" Joy said, stiffening.

On the street he linked his arm in hers; they were so used to each other they automatically fitted together like two pieces of a puzzle. "Look here," he said after some contemplation, "why don't you go abroad for a while as long as the going is good? In a year or two we might have another war and then it's good night to a great variety of nice and useful things in the world."

"I was abroad during the depression. Two years—France, Italy—it was cheaper over there than here——"

"Well—and?"

"And nothing. Mother came along. With disastrous results. Or what would you think?"

Larry pulled his thin hair in exasperation. "You are by no means the only daughter who let herself be sucked dry by a doting mother, and I've never understood what sort of masochistic fixation gets you girls that way. Forget Mother Dear, I beg you. Pull up your socks and go away. Mother Dear will survive it, I assure you. In fact it might be exactly the medicine she needs. Jesus, kid, I wish I could drag you to Paris with my own hands and get you out of the rut."

"Why don't you?" she said softly; perhaps it is still possible, she thought and there was the faint stirring of an old forsaken want, very hidden, muffled, embryonic—in her womb more than in her brains: I'll have a child of my own and I'll take it to the Enchanted Forest and fill its hand with the blue light, like Father filled mine——

"When you arrive in Paris, Larry—what's the first place you visit?"

"Oh, that depends. The bathroom, I suppose, if such be available. Les Deux Magots, Madame Charpentier, who cooked for me when I was at the Sorbonne——"

"No. I mean seriously."

"Seriously? Seriously and if you promise not to tell anyone,

I'll go first and take a bath and scrub off whatever sins of bad taste I've committed in the meantime, plus all the artificial fashions and fads that have barnacled on to me, and when I come out of the Sainte Chapelle I'll know again the difference between good and bad. Which is a thing God has actually forbidden—"But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat"—if you remember . . ."

"I knew it. The blue light——"

"You scoop it up in your hands, you wash your eyes in it——"

"Larry, if we were in Paris together we would have so much fun! Funny fun and serious fun and—well, just fun, don't you think?"

"Maybe yes and maybe no. But one thing I know; if we were in Paris together, I'd make a painter of you if I had to beat you up three times a day and rub your nose in Picasso's palette morning and night. But that's neither here nor there, because I have to stick around Treasure Island until we've done our job, Charley and me, and that's still a long way off. But you're not a prisoner, actually, kid, and it doesn't have to be Paris, just as long as you get yourself away and feed your eyes. Sometimes they look so hungry—as if they hadn't had anything to eat in ages."

They had walked up to the Coit Tower in a little silence and were looking down at city and bay. It was one of San Francisco's rare clear nights and there were young people sitting on the parapet, parked cars with crooning radios, chains of lights laid over the hills and across the Bay Bridge, and the prison on Alcatraz, lifted out by indirect lights, looked like a highly picturesque and expensive night club. Joy, arriving at the end of the silence, shook her head with some agitation. "No," she said, "I can't go away from here. And what's more, I don't want to."

"And why not? Any really valid reason—aside from your being a slave to Mother?"

She held her breath and looked into his eyes. "Would it frighten you very much if I told you, Larry, that you are the reason?" she said.

She felt his arm flinch in an involuntary movement, as though he wanted to withdraw it, but then he pulled her quickly a little closer yet into the warmth of his bulk. "Yes," he said. "It would frighten me."

He let go of her and took out his pipe and tobacco pouch

and filled it and tamped the tobacco down and struck a match but forgot to light the pipe. He only clamped his teeth over it as he took Joy's arm in a taut grip and began to walk again. "It always seemed a grotesque notion to me that anyone could be attracted by an elephant like me—except, perhaps, another elephant. But once there was a girl who fell in love with me—that's quite a number of years ago. She was the sister of my best friend—just as you are Charley's sister. But there the resemblance ends. She was hardly out of school, very young, very sheltered, fragile. Very fine thin porcelain. That girl committed suicide. I'm sorry if that sounds like something out of a dime novel but that's what happened: she was in love with me and when she found out what was the matter with me, she did away with herself. Joy—do you understand what I am trying to tell you or do I have to spell it out for you?"

Joy drew in her breath sharply. "I didn't know there was something the matter with you, Larry," she said at last.

"That's good. I hoped you didn't, nor Charley or Susan, nor anybody else. On the other hand, maybe a guy of my sort ought to go around with a sign around his neck: Ladies beware—so sorry! If I had given Gloria fair warning when it was still time to stop her from pinning her emotions on an unsuitable subject of my kind, she would be alive today and some man's happy wife and some children's loving mother. She was a lovely girl and I was infinitely fond of her. As fond as I am of you, kid. But not 'in love.' Now go and tell me about not knowing the hell of being sterile."

Joy braced herself; it was like being in the dentist's chair—"Miss Ambros, this might hurt a bit"—but she swallowed it bravely and managed a stiff smile. Larry Grant, of all people! So strong, so big, so kind—what a waste! she thought with a touch of grim mockery. Did it hurt, Miss Ambros? No, no, Doctor. Not much.

"You mean you simply don't care for women?" she muttered out of the depth of her confusion. If I had painted him I would have found out. His hands would have given his secret away—

"You're awfully hard of hearing tonight, kid. I do care for women, but not in the accepted way. I like some of them very, very much—up to a point, and then it is as if a guillotine had fallen and cut me off. If I ever tried to go beyond that point

it would be dishonest and an unspeakable mess and swindle. Not to live against my nature and to try not to hurt anyone, that's the only decent way I've found for myself."

He let go of her arm at last and stopped at the foot of the hill. "I don't want to mess around, and I have come to prefer the life of the hermit crab; or the monk, if you choose to call it that. Sex is as important or unimportant as you make it." He sounded agitated and resigned, like a man who had repeated the same arguments in the same dispute again and again without quite convincing his opponent: himself.

"Does it make you very lonesome?" Joy asked, tiptoeing into closed terrain.

"Does it? I don't think I'm more lonesome than human beings are in general. Lonesomeness is our natural habitat and we do better to accept the fact, which we learn anyway by experience from the time we're two years old. Lonesomeness is at the core of everything, kid, and don't tell me that you don't know it. Of course, there is a good amount of free-floating libido in a fellow my size and I have to do a mighty powerful lot of sublimating—but I like people and I'm having fun, and designing a good chair or a tool handle or a water tap is a full-time job and highly satisfying as substitutes go. Do you want to walk home or shall we take a taxi? My car broke down again."

He gave her arm a last squeeze and took her face between his hands and searched for some answer in her eyes; Joy made an athletic effort to hold up her bland and friendly smile against the hundred-pound weights pulling at the corners of her mouth. That's how I grow those sharp lines like brackets, she thought to herself.

"You aren't disgusted, kid, you won't like me less because I am what I can't help being?" he asked searchingly.

"Don't be silly, Larry. We've an old contract: Let's be good to each other."

He bent down and kissed her mouth. It felt weightless and cool like a wet leaf dropping from an enormous tree.

Some people have all the tough luck, she thought. Was I in love with Larry Grant? she asked herself. No, but I could have been, she answered herself. She crept back into Greenwich Street and built another little vault in which to bury another abortive little secret.

Back to Dr. Behrman—" . . . I'm a bit shaken up, Doctor, my nerves are out of sorts . . ."—and he was poking about

in her with scant results. "At present I really don't see any cause for worry, Miss Ambros . . ."

And where are we now? Tokema, long past midnight, and I have killed, or tried to kill, Mother. No cause for worry, indeed. That's me, Joy Ambros, who is waiting for the ambulance, trying to brace herself for the nightmarish things that are ahead of her: interrogation, investigation, identification of a mangled body, autopsy, and worse than all this: having to face her brother, to play her part to the end. This was she, herself, this she, herself, had done, all this she, herself, would have to go through. And all the time she felt removed, as if her real self were far away, somewhere else, somebody else. The thin ice had cracked, she was sinking, the pieces of her had finally come apart and she was split in two, one Joy Ambros who had killed Mother and was glad of it; and another Joy who couldn't understand how it had happened and who would have given her life to undo it. And this, ladies and gentlemen, said Professor Wurtzefinger, is what modern psychiatry calls schizophrenic.

She began to laugh quietly, irresistibly, and the yellow dog at her feet promptly wagged his tail. He stood up, stretched and yawned, showing his thin, curling, pink tongue; Joy held on to him as to a saving bit of reality in the floating vagueness that threatened to engulf her.

"Miss Ambros?" somebody said and an elongated shadow was thrown across the bench. She looked up; there stood a man in uniform whose name she didn't remember. His hair was almost white and his face was lined but not old, his skin and his eyeballs had a yellow tinge, she noticed it even in the pale light of the lonesome bulb overhead. It was funny that her eyes functioned with such quick perception of colour and form even though her mind did not. Then, all at once, like a first chord at a conductor's downbeat, her scattered senses and brains and reflexes reassembled and came together, and with great lucidity she thought: Atabrin.

"Did you have a little bout with malaria, Major Ryerson?" she said politely.

"Off and on, Miss Ambros. But only a mild one, hardly worse than a cold."

George Watts had sent him ahead to the station. "You go and look after Joy, the poor girl must be in an awful state. Just don't leave her alone, talk to her, keep her mind occupied while I get that slowpoke of a doctor going. It's a cinch for

a first-class public relations man like you." Well, it wasn't a cinch, thought Ryerson; if she had cried, if she had been small and helpless, it would have been easier; he could have put his arms around her and cuddled her a bit—but then he remembered: small, helpless, crying girls who liked to be cuddled had a way of going to bed with a couple of other guys while you were on a not too comfortable mission in the Pacific or in a lousy hospital on a lousy speck of an island with a lousy combination of malaria and dysentery: soft cuddly girls like Corinne could get as hard as flint when it came to arranging the terms of a divorce, the bitches. "Is there anything I could do for you, Miss Ambros?" he asked, properly solicitous.

"If you could give me a cigarette—thanks, I seem to have smoked all of mine plus those of the stationmaster." In the brief flare of the match he watched her face; the stone of which it was sculptured seemed to have softened somewhat.

"I brought you some coffee; there is a truck drivers' joint down the road, you can't get better coffee anywhere," he said, unscrewing the top from the flask he had previously taken along; a friendly, fragrant curl of steam rose from it. "Watch out, it's hot, don't burn your tongue," said Ryerson.

When she was half-way through she stopped and caught her breath. "Thanks," she said again, "that was very thoughtful of you, Major Ryerson." She was searching his face with a queer inquisitiveness, a concentrated attention that made him feel uncomfortable. "You *are* Major Ryerson, aren't you? What are you doing in Tokema?"

It was a question hard to answer, even for a public relations man who, in his civilian life, handled some really important accounts. You couldn't very well say: Who, me? I stayed on out of sheer vulgar curiosity, I'm a hard-boiled newspaper hound and I got a scent that tickled my nose. "Oh, just so——" he said vaguely. "Didn't want to desert good old George; I thought maybe I could make myself useful to him. Or to you," he added lamely.

"Who is George?"

Ryerson had seen many men go batty after a severe shock; he was not baffled. "Old George Watts, the lawyer; I believe he's an old friend of yours?" he said compliantly.

"Oh yes, of course. George Watts! He helped me bake mud pies when I was three. In Belvedere. I used to call him Gogol."

Ryerson fished for a conversational topic. Keep her mind occupied, go on, you mug, do your public relations stuff. "George tells me you're a painter, Miss Ambros? I'd like to see some of your work." She kept staring at him in that queer, penetrating way.

"I believe the Cliff House sold the last *Sunset over the Golden Gate* during the war. Those poor G.I.s are such suckers for trash," she said, and Ryerson thought that she was going to smile; but it was only a twitch, the reflex of a pain, like those of very little babies with a bellyache.

"But from now on I think I'll paint again," she said, and she had a very clear conception of what she would paint next. She had fixed the major's face in her mind, the drabness of the station, the rails coming out of nowhere and going into nowhere as a background, the uniform, shrill colour accent of the red and white badge on his sleeve, the rainbow of ribbons on his chest, white hair that had been dark when the war began, yellow malaria skin, lines of disillusion and fatigue in the good, straight, square American face born to good-natured laughter and an aggressive idealism, but weary now and spent. Strip it, cut it down to the essential, make it impersonal, not a portrait but a state of mind shaped into a pattern, call it *Return*. Call it nothing at all but paint it. Paint it.

Ryerson chafed uneasily under her concentrated glance. "Yes, I think I'm a painter after all. I bottled it up much too long. Maybe if I hadn't—but now I'll paint again," she said. "If they let me." The last sounded enigmatic and Ryerson let it go at that.

"There they are now," he said with some relief as the sound of a car stopping behind the station was heard. The station-master bustled out of his cubicle and Joy got up and faced the men whom Watts was ushering in.

"Sorry it took so long, Joy. This is Sheriff Lambson. And Deputy Sheriff McFarland. I took the liberty of handling the formalities so far, and now the sheriff wants to ask you a few routine questions. Perhaps it's best you drive with the sheriff, while Ryerson and I go ahead with the ambulance. You're sure, Joy, you want to come along?"

"Oh yes, absolutely. I—I'm responsible for the—accident——"

The sheriff didn't look at all as sheriffs look in the movies and, consequently, in the imagination of the people. He was

a rather young man in a dark blue business suit; he wore his badge though, and he had high Indian cheekbones and calm eyes. McFarland was middle-aged, stiffly buttoned into a dark Sunday church suit; he had the solicitously assuring airs of the undertaker he was. Both men held their hats in their hands, probably to show their respect for the bereaved daughter.

"Well, if you're ready, Miss Ambros, let's go. We can talk in the car."

Joy braced herself. "Okay. Let's," she said. The yellow dog yawned, stretched, and decided to come along.

PART FOUR

ANGELINA did not know how long she had been going, but it was a long, an immeasurably long trek towards an unknown goal. Time had lost all validity, it had become a void in which she was wandering without destination; past, present, and future were one and the same, a round, compact dark sphere in whose centre she was suspended, trying to keep her balance. There were long stretches in which she got lost, and small clearings of rest, and a dim circling around haunted places, and stops and detours, and much bewildered confusion, broken by flashes of an amazing lucidity. It was a long night of many stations which Angelina passed, without knowing—nor wishing to know—at what terminal she was going to arrive in the end.

Somewhere high up, inaccessible on the crest of the steep embankment, her train was steaming away, with her luggage on it, her handbag, her good steamer rug. Her daughter was on the train, but you couldn't count on her, nor on George Watts, who had always been beastly. But what about that nice Major Ryerson who'd given up his compartment? He, at least, was a gentleman; why hadn't he stopped the train? Were there no laws, no rules for the rescue of passengers who went overboard? Where were the police? What do we all pay taxes for? What's this country coming to altogether? "Listen, you: I must catch my train, it is imperative. Absolutely necessary and imperative," she informed the deaf night. During the last two years she had taken to talking aloud whenever she was left alone. It was a good way of letting off steam and also it was reassuring to hear your own voice. Moreover, there was this little trouble with her ears; head noises, quite irritating, she liked to drown them out by her little monologues.

Just now they were exceedingly loud inside her head because those noises grew much stronger when she was tired. Angelina, the frail, fragile one, the delicate one, had complained about many aches and troubles all her life. But so far she had never mentioned to either her family or her friends these annoying head noises which Dr. Bryant chose to designate impolitely as a very common symptom of old age.

She shook her head to clear it of the fuzzy spiderwebs, she stopped for a minute to breath deeply and systematically even though it hurt, and she did not permit herself to sit down and take a rest, much as she was yearning for it. If I let myself sit down, I won't ever be able to get up again, she told herself, and the dependable, driving little motor in her still functioned and kept her in motion. After a while she was rewarded with a small revelation: let's see: Boston? Of course—I'm going to meet Charles. Well, why do I have to tramp after him? Why can't he come to me? We'd sit in front of the fire and have a nice chat and I'd baked the cake he always liked, Grandmère's old Viennese recipe. Now that the war is over we don't have to be so careful with the sugar and the flour I stored away. Bless you, Son, you'll never know how much I love you in spite of everything you've done to me. You almost broke my heart with your selfishness, Charley, but a mother's love forgives everything and never ends . . .

She stopped, fighting for breath, and after she had deeply inhaled across the hurdle of pain in her chest, she smiled, because just a moment ago Charley had been three years old, kicking his sturdy legs as she was holding him on her lap. She unbuttoned her mangled mink coat and slipped her fingers inside of her blouse. Yes, the medallion was still there, undamaged. You wouldn't have thought that I always carry a curl of your baby hair in my locket, would you? I know it's sentimental and old-fashioned, but that's the way I am. Not like that brash little slut you married. You behaved like a real little man when you had your first haircut, you pushed out your lower lip, square like a box, but you didn't cry. "Never saw a little boy with nicer curls," Mr. Lampert said. "Why, you could send them to the mint and have shiny new silver dollars made from them," he said. "But I'm not surprised, seeing what a pretty mother he has, the lucky little fellow; that's the third generation of your family I have the honour of serving, Mrs. Ambros." Dear me, how well I remember Lampert's shop window from the time I was a little girl. The

two heads, one golden blond with absolutely devastating moustaches, the other with black whiskers——

She stopped to catch her breath once more. "This is simply too silly," she reprimanded herself strictly. To remember those forsaken wax heads in the barbershop, yet not to remember why she had to keep on going to Boston. "Partial amnesia. A very common symptom of senility." Dr. Behrman had called similar embarrassing lapses and faux pas of the Generalin. Oh heck, stop being silly. The Generalin was raving mad to begin with and past eighty. I'm not senile. I remember everything, every little bit of my life do I remember. In fact I wish I could forget a few things; they're unpleasant, I'm not feeling well, leave me in peace, listen, Florian, don't let's quarrel about it, not now, not tonight, can't you see I'm weak and very tired and my head is buzzing and every single bone in my body hurts; please, Flori, please, believe me, I meant well, I did it because I loved you, I loved you more than anything in the world, that's why I——

Mile after mile, and at every step of it she was involved in a heated dispute with her dead husband; it was a dispute that had begun in Belvedere the morning after the Fire, and had continued through the nervous years of their secret, dangerous, and stormy love affair, through the almost twenty years of their erratic marriage, and still had remained unsolved and unfinished when Florian died.

The embankment had flattened out somewhat, its slope had become less high, less steep. Angelina took a deep breath, collected all her strength, and bracing herself, she attempted the ascent. Her raw palms gripped tough, cutting grass blades, thistles, gravel, cinder, her knees burned, the abrasions on her legs began to bleed again. Her heart gave out when she was halfway up, her fingers lost their hold, and she slid down once more.

The earth was trembling, shaking, and her heart pounded in panic. Panting, stomping uproar, rush of great noise, and flash of light. What is this? Judgment Day? But it happened to be only a train, coming and passing and gone, on the crest of the embankment where the rails reeled east. Angelina came out of her hazy torment, she waved and called. Never had her hand been smaller or lonelier than now, trying to stop that huffing monster of a train. The night had grown darker in the meantime, no moon, no stars, not even that wickedly blinking beacon of light on some distant hill. The clouds hung low and

thick around her like a flapping tent, the air had grown moist, and while Angelina drew herself up with very great pain and effort and began to walk once more, the moisture became a fog of a million wet needle pricks, a drizzle, rain. Angelina dragged herself on and on, left all alone in a world that had made itself invisible.

I'm used to it, she thought sadly. I've always been left alone, that's just the trouble. In Leihana, the birth of the child, the death of the child. In the great Fire. In the War. When Florian was ill, when he died. Always alone. It's easy for those selfish young folks to laugh about an old woman who is afraid of being alone, they don't know what they're laughing about. You do everything for them, you try to hold them, but they don't care, they leave you and do what they please. If Charles had listened to me, where would he be today? He would have married that lovely Blunt girl and inherited half of the Blunt estate and when the War started they would have given him a commission and he could have sat out the whole trouble as an important man in Washington. But no, he had to let himself be caught by that little nobody. Instead of cultivating Johnny O'Shaughnessy and getting some of the fat contracts he can dole out, Charley has his head filled with newfangled nonsense and foolish unprofitable projects. But I know who put it into his mind; no one but that scheming Susan and that obnoxious boy friend of hers. That Larry Grant, acting as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. But I was the first one to see through him and his shabby tricks! From the first moment I suspected that those two were carrying-on together, and God knows, if I hadn't warned Joy that Mr. Grant courted her only to fool Charles, we might have had a second affair Hollenbeck on our hands. Who would believe that a few times even Joy was on the verge of leaving me alone—as if she didn't need me more than I need her! And after everything I've lived through, what with my son in the War, while his wife is having herself a fine time with her lover, and Joy getting funnier every day—after all this they wonder why I'm afraid of being left alone.

"It's just a little nervous quirk," Susan had said, erroneously assuming that Angelina, playing with the children in the nursery, was out of earshot. But Angelina's ears were sharp, thank you, and her attention was not completely with her grandchildren and she heard every mean remark. "The Greeks must have a word for it, but unfortunately I'm strictly

a product of Madison High and never got beyond the proverbial two-syllable words of the native moron. Why don't you take Maw to Dr. Behrman, Joy? He'll comb the knots out of her hair and we'll all live happily ever after."

"It's no good, Susie. Maw is too old for the confessional couch. Never turn an old stone, and never stir up the subconscious in a person past sixty. Too many nasty things underneath," Charles had chimed in, in the comprehensible and infuriating jargon of his generation. Calling her Maw as if she were a character from a comic strip and discussing her like an old piece of furniture up for auction.

"Mother Dear simply worships the ground on which she treads." This was Susan again, and Angelina put down little Florian's picture book and entered the living-room, enraged but smiling. "Now don't you, darling?" Susan continued, friendly and smiling back at her. "Our Maw is a Machiavelli in reverse. Machiavelli believed in getting the best results by appealing to the worst in people. Mother, on the contrary, is using our best instincts for leverage; I think her trust in human goodness is admirable."

"But you are so right," that double-faced Larry Grant would put in his bit. "There is no end to the mischief you can do by appealing to all that's noble in people. Patriotism, nationalism, wars—religious ones and otherwise—crusades and fights for all sorts of causes and isms—all set in motion by an appeal to our most sacred feelings. Save Home and Country! Preserve Our Way of Life! Protect Your Mothers, Wives, Sisters, and Children! In the name of all that's good, go out and lynch, hang, shoot, burn down, kill and get killed, drop bombs on others and get bombs dropped on you! No, we wouldn't do it, not for all the gold in Fort Knox; we wouldn't do it if we were told that we are beasts of prey by nature who have to see blood every so often on account of the vile residue of cannibalism in us. But tell us that we are knights in shining armour, unfurl a flag and put a cross on it, or a swastika, a crown or a sickle, give us some sort of an elating symbol and we'll puff up our chests and inflate ourselves with high ideals until we soar like a bloody blimp and go off like the noble idiots we are and wreak havoc."

"Apropos—I came by a junkyard down near Mission Street today, where you can buy yourself secondhand an only slightly used soapbox: very cheap, Granty," Charles would say with a fatherly pat on Grant's not quite bald head, and

Angelina was once more left fumbling for smart repartee.

"Well, if it's wrong to believe in the goodness of people, I can't help it, I was brought up that way, it's probably very old-fashioned or how do you call it nowadays? Obsolete? All I know is that I always did what I considered my duty and, naturally, I expect that all people act like that—it's probably very foolish of me——"

She wasn't as foolish as they thought, though. She had kept a sharp eye on Susan and Mr. Grant, especially after Charles had gone overseas and this big fat Grant had stayed home. "What ropes did Mr. Grant pull that the Army didn't get him?" she asked angrily.

"Why, darling, don't you know that the Army doesn't take anyone whose first name is Lawrence?" Susan said. Once more Angelina felt lost among a wild tribe whose jabbering she didn't comprehend, and Joy seemed to blush for some reason as she quickly said: "Susan is joking, Mother. Larry has some honest-to-goodness heart trouble and he's over age anyway."

"Besides, he claims that the Army couldn't dig up a uniform big enough for him. In any case, Charley is very glad that Larry could stay behind and take care of the office in the meantime. And of me—and the kids also."

That he certainly has done, Angelina thought grimly. The world had gone topsy-turvy and morals had become unbelievably lax, but even so, there was much gossip and eyebrow raising, especially among The Girls. "If those two would at least use some discretion, if they wouldn't make a public spectacle of themselves," she complained to Joy.

"Did it ever occur to you that they might have nothing to be discreet about?" Joy answered; she had clasped her hands behind her back, a gesture which always gave Angelina a little pang because Joy reminded her then of Florian at his nastier moments. "Leave them alone, don't meddle. Do you hear me, Mother?" Joy had said in a constricted voice and without looking at her. "For once, don't meddle or you'll come to grief."

Angelina had not meddled. She had only bustled over to the little house on Russian Hill, bright and early in the morning, to read to Susan a newly arrived letter from Charles. Never had there been a visit made with better intent. A mother, getting up at dawn, waiting for the bus on a cold morning, hanging to the straps almost all the way—because nothing

short of her fainting would have made those coarse young defence workers in their blue overalls relinquish their seats to an old lady—a mother generously willing to share her son's letter with that loathsome girl he had married.

And there they were, seated at the kitchen counter designed by Grant and built in by Charles: Susan in her flannel robe under which the nightgown showed; both children ready for kindergarten; and Mr. Larry Grant, in shirt sleeves, without a necktie, and smelling of shaving lotion like a husband. He and Susan exchanged a quick embarrassed glance and Susan was fidgety.

"Why, Mother—you shouldn't be up and around so early. Is there—I hope you had no bad news? Everything okay in the Old Manse? Did the plumber come and fix the toilet? Larry phoned him last night for you——"

"May I make you a batch of my flapjacks, sweet Angelina? I won a blue ribbon at the Watsonville County fair with them, you know," Grant offered with strained eagerness.

"I'm terribly sorry to break in on this idyll," Angelina said stiffly, while the egg-beater began purring like a cat in Mr. Grant's dexterous hands. "If I had known you had a guest for breakfast, Susan, I certainly wouldn't have come at this hour——"

"Now, Maw, don't you go Emily Post on us. You aren't disturbing anybody; come, have a cup of coffee, Larry wangled it for us from a friend at the P.X."

"Larry says the next time he sleeps here he'll bring me a candy bar," Maxine piped up.

"Me too," echoed little Florian, hopping from his chair and throwing his arms round one of Grant's legs to get his attention. "When will you sleep here again, Larry? Soon, Larry?"

Angelina was aghast and even Susan's brazen front seemed shaken. "We were working late, straightening out the pay roll, so I made Larry stay overnight. There's a lot of overhang when Larry sleeps on the couch, but that's his fault, he designed it for people under three hundred pounds. I make him stay here quite often. It's so cosy to have a man around——"

Grant was muttering to the skillet: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*," and Susan threw a quick glance at Angelina's white, frozen face; there was impertinent persiflage again as she

added: "Must be my shady upbringing. Mother had a boarding-house; without a boarder I feel lonesome, I guess."

The nerve of it, the affrontery, the shameless exhibition of immorality. Like a tough piece of leather, Angelina had chewed on it until it became soft and pliable and assumed the desired and useful shape. Larry slept here. He stays overnight here quite often. It's more cosy to have a man in the house. It was a confession, wasn't it? . . .

But was it the truth? Was it? Something tore apart, blindly, and for a moment she stared at herself as if through a slit, a gash cut into the soft cocoon of lifelong self-deception. It was a terrible moment, trial and judgment and condemnation pressed together in one brief flash of utter nakedness. A chorus of voices was cursing her through the roaring in her head and she saw herself, not in a flattering mirror and not with her own eyes, but as she appeared to the silent, merciless gargoyle glance of those she had harmed and hurt. Beatrice, Mousie, Hopper, Maud, Joy, Florian? Yes, even Florian. And now Susan, and now Charley, her own son—and in the end the Wicked Queen had to dance in red-hot slippers and no one was sorry for her. Angelina struggled for breath and instinctively covered her eyes, not to see more of herself, and the dreadful moment passed and she rallied to her defence.

What do you want from me? I never killed anybody, but Joy tried to kill me. I was right about her, I always knew that she might go mad someday, she never was like other girls, I'm glad that I warned Fred Hollenbeck, glad, do you hear me? It was my duty, wasn't it? I took good care of your child, Florian, believe me, and you, Maud, I really did——

I could have married again. I could be Senator O'Shaughnessy's wife today and live high, wide, and handsome in Washington, but I never thought of myself, only of Joy. I always worried about her, I always sensed that some day something was going to happen to that poor, unstable mind of hers, the poor, lost creature——

Because now I'll have to put her in an institution and what a blow that will be to poor Charles on top of the other trouble. It's lucky that he has at least his mother to stand by him when he gets divorced from Susan. Just the two of us at last. We'll sit before the fire and chat and I'll bake him that cake he likes so well——

No. It did not get her anywhere. It was not the truth and

tonight only the truth would do. Lord, Lord, Lord, have mercy! she moaned; but this was not between her and God—not yet; she had only circled the outskirts and stalled and procrastinated, yet there was no reprieve, no letting up, she must dig deeper and deeper to the buried centre of guilt, and answer the voices that filled the night and hissed ever louder in her ears.

Listen, God, listen, Florian, I'm telling the truth now, the whole and holy truth. I hated my sister, that is true. I wished her out of my way; I think I prayed that she might die. A few times I dreamed she was dead and in my dreams I was happy about it. But I did not really want her to die, God Almighty, listen, I only wanted her to divorce you, Florian, so I could have you to myself at last. I did not kill her, I'm not guilty of her death, listen, Florian, I'll tell you how it happened——

My ribs were still taped after our auto accident, which had made so much noise in the papers, and breathing hurt me as it hurts now; but the day I was discharged from the hospital I decided I could not postpone any longer having it out with Maud. She had sent me flowers and good wishes but she had not come to see me. I was still in mourning for poor Hopper and I had lost much weight. I could see in Maud's face that she was shocked about the change in my appearance. She came towards me and held out her hands when she saw me stagger into her living room. I was still very, very weak, you understand. "Sit down, sit down," she said. "You look like your own ghost."

"I *am* my own ghost," I said and let myself drop into a chair. There was a fire in the grate and there were some of Joy's toys on the carpet; and the little girl came running up to me and wanted to be cuddled as she was used to, but Maud said: "Leave you aunt alone, honey, she isn't feeling well."

Indeed I wasn't. I had come in a cab and waited in it at the corner until I was sure that you, Florian, had left the house. It had been a sunny noon, but then the wind had changed all of a sudden and the sky was growing dark. I felt every change of the weather in my broken ribs and I had a hard time to keep my heart going.

"I want to show Annelina my pictures," said Joy.

"Leave Annelina alone," said Maud. "Run along, little chipmunk, leave your aunt in peace." I did not quite know how to begin and Maud did not help me much. "It's foolish

of you to go out in this weather," she said. "Here, take a sip of sherry."

"I came to tell you how sorry I am about the whole thing. About the accident we had and the noise in the papers and everything——" I said.

Maud only smiled; I could never see that smile of hers without getting furious. It was so complacent, a little condescending, almost as though she were sorry for me. "You better say that twice," she said. "It'll take Flori at least four weeks before he'll be able to use his left hand again."

I swallowed. "That's not what I mean. I mean I should have told you that I was driving to Carmel with him."

"It would have been better. I could have warned him that you're not a safe driver," she said. I looked at my hands and she looked at them too. I think she always envied me for wearing five-and-a-half gloves. "I just couldn't hold the car when it began swerving," I said. "My hands aren't strong enough."

"Look here, Ann," she said. "Don't let's beat about the bush. You came here to tell me something. Tell it and let's be done with it."

"All right," I said. "As you wish. It wasn't an accident. I drove the car deliberately off the road and into that brick wall. I wanted to kill both of us, Flori and me."

"That's interesting," said Maud; she wiped her mouth with her handkerchief and then scrutinized it. It was a silly, unpleasant habit; as if she were expecting a haemorrhage any moment. "That's interesting," she said. "But let's leave out the melodrama and get down to brass tacks. Did you write me all those anonymous letters? About my husband keeping a mistress?"

I decided to ignore the insult and gave no answer. I only looked at her. "Not very subtle, Ann," she said. I felt tears coming to my eyes, I couldn't help it, I was still very weak, you understand——

"Great mercy, Ann, what a mess you've got yourself in—— and with my own husband," Maud said. "Don't you know how spoiled he is? A pretty girl like you—you should be too proud to be just one more of that brigade of women who're always running after him. Bumping into a wall is no solution, neither from your angle, nor mine, nor Flori's. But you're a reckless little fool and always were. Why did you write me those letters? Why did you wish it splashed over every paper

in town that you had been on a secret outing with your brother-in-law? Are you still trying to get scarlet fever in order to ruin other people's picnics?"

We had both forgotten about the child in the corner; Joy was such a quiet little mouse. I hated Maud. Of course I hated her. There she was sitting on her broad beam, this was her house, and her fireplace, and her child, and her husband; all hers. Mine, mine, mine, she boasted with every smile, with that detached cool pose of hers. And there was I, all alone, a widow, no one to stand up for me if I didn't myself—

"I prefer a public scandal to a secret love affair. I can't go on hiding and lying and sneaking an hour here and a kiss there. I'm not cut out to be the Other Woman."

"That's good news. I hadn't particularly noticed this side of your character. But if that is so, I think it would be best if you left town for a few months and let some grass grow over the whole mess. Why don't you go to New York? You could have much fun in the East—or maybe I could arrange for you to visit with the Darnells in New Orleans and stay there for the Mardi Gras——"

"When I came here," I said, "so help me God, I didn't wish to be rude. But if you treat me like a loose woman who can be bought off—all right, I'll tell you what I came to say. Florian loves me and I love him and you should never have come between us. If it weren't for me, the last spark would have gone out of him in that humdrum life you offer him. Florian needs romance, glamour, excitement, stimulation——"

"I doubt that it was so very stimulating for him to be driven into a brick wall and have his wrist wrenched. Don't you dare come and tell me what Florian needs. Peace of mind he needs, and regular meals, and his fair amount of sleep, and a few other little things of which you have never heard; care and consideration, for instance. There is enough spark and inspiration and restlessness in him to blow the roof off the house, that's why a humdrum wife like myself is just right for him. Really, Ann, I'm trying hard not to lose my patience, but I refuse to discuss my marriage with you. I knew that you'd had a little crush on Flori ever since you were a pig-tailed kid, but don't ask me to take that seriously. If I took every woman seriously who's been after my husband, or every girl who took his fancy for a week or two, then I'd really not be the right wife for him."

I was sure that Maud didn't feel at all as safe and detached as she pretended; on her cheeks were sharp red circles like those on a lacquered German peasant doll and she was wiping her mouth and blotting the perspiration from her forehead, which a moment later was damp again. "You, Ann," she said, "ought to know best that I'm not tying Florian down; if he didn't have his full freedom, he couldn't have dashed off and spent a whole week with you in Carmel——"

Her attitude of the forgiving wife made me see red. Let the boy have his little fling, he'll come back, husbands always come back, repenting, and loving the little wife more than before——

"Florian's freedom—that's exactly what I came to discuss with you. If there was a shred of pride left in you, Maud, you'd have asked for a divorce when you learned that we had been away together. But if you insist on pretending that you're deaf and blind, you force me to tell you to your face how matters stand. Florian loves me, get that into your head, he loves only me and you're nothing but a burden he's dragging along because he's too softhearted to shake you off. If you had ever been a real wife to Flori you would have felt for a long time that he doesn't care for you——"

I knew it was brutal and I wanted to be brutal. I hadn't been less brutal with myself when I drove that automobile into the wall; I had been desperate and I still was and I saw no reason why I should always be the one to suffer while Maud was to be kept blissfully unaware of any ill wind that might blow her way. She was holding on to herself but she had begun to tremble; she was wearing a blouse of Irish crochet with a ruffled jabot, and every fussy butterfly and flower and scallop of that jabot was quivering. "Stop it, Ann, you don't quite know what you're saying," she whispered, clearing her throat; she tried not to cough but could not suppress it. That was another habit of hers which got on my nerves: she always coughed as though she had a bad conscience; she did her coughing the way some women do their shoplifting. "Go, go away, I don't want to hear another word," she said thickly.

I was trembling too, with anger and hurt. "Sorry, but I won't be shaken off like this; you're a fool if you think you can treat me like one of the girls who take Flori's fancy for a week or two and get thrown in the ashcan when it's over. I came to ask you to divorce Florian, it's the only decent

thing for you to do, and I won't go without an answer. You've been talking about your patience, Maud, but what about my patience? My patience is at an end too, I'm through standing back and being pushed into the corner and if you still won't face the issue, I'll make such a rumpus, I'll stir up such a scandal—— You think you can tell me to go away? Why don't you go away yourself where you are not wanted? But you're dull and thick-skinned and complacent, and on top of it you're a sick woman. You are of no use to Flori, you are ruining him, but you keep him chained to your bedpost——”

“Don't, Ann—don't——” Maud whispered hoarsely, but I didn't let her interrupt me.

“Do you think you can hold him by making him squat at your side and hold hands with you and watch you spit into your hankies? If he wasn't sick and tired of you before, he certainly is by now, and if you won't let go of him I'll shout it from every roof that Florian belongs to me and not to you——”

I'm an impetuous fool, I know, Flori, and I had to use strong language to make Maud yield. For more than two years I had taken all the beating; what am I saying—I had taken the beating ever since you came to the old home on Clay Street for the first time, remember? Now it was Maud's turn to be pushed aside and learn to play second fiddle. What I had told her really wasn't so very bad, was it? If you hadn't come back just then, nothing much would have happened. Maud would have divorced you, I'd have seen to that; and we would have married and gone abroad and you'd have had more triumphs than ever before, I'd have seen to that too. And we'd never have needed to cross Maud's path again——

Or, funny to think: if the weather had been better that day . . .

The storm had come up while I was talking to Maud, a cloudburst slashing with an unholy noise against the windows. You were shaking the water from your hair like a wet dog as you entered. It was still early in the afternoon, but almost dark, and you switched on the light and you looked at Maud, and then at me and at Maud again. There was electricity in the air, each hair of mine was loaded with it and my finger tips tingled. I believe I must have been very pale, I had not expected you, I had not seen you since the accident. I was a

bit afraid of you, Florian; I did not know whether you were mad at me or not. You had called me reckless quite often; but, Flori, you liked my being reckless, didn't you? Oh yes, you did! Maud, too, was white, except for those sharply drawn red cheeks of hers. "Storm signals are up," you said. "It's a weather not to chase out the proverbial dog."

"Yes, but this rain will be good for the hydrangeas," Maud said; I remember it very definitely. It's the sort of nonsense one babbles in critical moments.

"Anything the matter, girls? Maud? Angelina? Did you have a sister-to-sister talk?"

"I want to ask you something, Flori," Maud said. "And all I want you to answer is yes or no."

"Sounds biblical: your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay."

"My sister informs me that you've carried on a love affair with her. Is that true?"

"Well—Maud, you mustn't think—it's not as simple——"

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Is it something—serious?"

"Quite."

"And for how long has this gone on?"

"Since the Fire—more than two years. And even before—we've always been in love—even before you married him," I said.

"I didn't ask you, Ann. You answer me, Flori——"

"Yes, Maud. But let me explain——"

"Thank you for not lying——" she said. "I'll—I'll have to think this over. All by myself. I can't talk to you now, Flori. Later. Maybe."

Perhaps I should not have held you, Flori, when you wanted to run after her but I needed you so much just then; I needed to feel protected for once, feel that you were worried about me too; more than about Maud. I had just come from the hospital, I was still so very weak and dizzy; I was in no condition to think very clearly. I threw myself into your arms, I held on to you. I couldn't bear it at that moment to see you run after her. Let her drink bitter tea for once, I thought. I didn't say it, and it wasn't very long that I held you back, was it? I had no sense of time at that moment. Three minutes? Five? I heard the house door slam but I didn't know it was Maud who had run out in the storm.

The truth and nothing but the truth——

All right. I knew it and I did not want you to run after her. But believe me, believe me, I did not want her to die. I wanted her to divorce you, that was all. I didn't want her to make up with you and forgive you, I didn't want to be pushed out of your life, I couldn't bear losing you. She would have died anyway, sooner or later, with those weak lungs of hers. If she had been healthy and strong, she would not have died from getting wet feet and catching cold, not even of pneumonia would she have died if she hadn't been sick before, would she? Florian, believe me, dear God in heaven, believe me, tonight, when I feel that I myself might not live to see the morning:

I did not kill my sister, nor did I wish to kill her—though I was glad when she was dead and out of my way. And this is the truth and nothing but the truth.

Tired out from the prolonged delivery of Mrs. Winston's twins, Dr. Gerrick had taken the front seat next to the ambulance driver in the hope that the fresh air would keep him awake. Watts and Ryerson were not too comfortably seated inside the rattling old ambulance, whose space was greatly taken up by the stretcher. Provident sheets and blankets were bouncing on the rack and there was a reek of iodine and rigid antiseptics. Once in a while the driver let go with a howl of the siren. The two men had been requested to refrain from smoking, but they smoked all the same, Ryerson sucking on his pipe, and Watts biting into a slim cigar.

"Not much of a joy ride, is it?" he said. "I don't see why you should have let yourself in for this instead of comfortably toddling off to the Pentagon Building."

"Oh, that's all right. This reminds me of the time I was on the police beat of the Sacramento *Bee*. Quite cosy, in fact, compared with a few little things that I saw out in the Pacific."

"Don't tell me it's the old news hound on a hot scent."

"Lord, no. It's just—well, I guess having signed a contract for my first book makes me a bit ruthless when I'm on the track of anything that seems like material for another short story. Remember, back on the train, you promised me one—what did you call it? 'Danger from Deer'? Or perhaps: 'How the hell did Miss Ambros happen to become an old

maid?' You know, George, I was talking with her at the station, just a few minutes, but I was quite impressed. Not a single silly or hysterical word out of that girl. She seems to have remarkable self-control. A nice person to be with in an air raid. Makes one wonder——"

"Excellent. You go on wondering about Joy Ambros while I do my bit of wondering about Ann. Holy mackerel, I certainly wonder what she's up to this time, the sweet little old witch!"

"*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, George——"

"That's a very laudable sentiment, Tommy boy, and I promise I'll write her the finest obituary as soon as I am convinced that she is dead and gone—and not a moment sooner. I know Ann, and I'm telling you, there's something fishy about that sudden disappearing act of hers; I can't put my finger on it, but my good old nose tells me that there is something—well—something not quite—in fact, I would not put it beyond her to have arranged an accident in order to draw some insurance money, or to get Joy into trouble, or do some other sort of mischief—how do I know? I'm just sniffing and groping. But I keep asking myself: when the train stopped right after the accident and the tracks were thoroughly searched for almost ten minutes—why was there no mangled body to be found? Why not a trace of Ann Ambros—if she really fell off the train?"

"But that's fantastic, George, that's——"

"It wouldn't appear so fantastic to you if you had run head on into a few of Ann's tricks the way I have. She duped me twice—and I don't wish to be duped a third time, that's all. It's all a bit too pat. I don't know much about your business, but I seem to have read that it doesn't make a good story, if things are too pat. It's the same in my business, Tom. As a corporation lawyer who has to fight a good number of phony insurance claims each month, I can assure you that it makes me suspicious if things are too pat. And they've been a bit too pat in Ann's life to suit me. People who got in her way disappeared and died most conveniently—mind you, I don't wish to hint that Ann killed them, far from it. They just died anyhow. People who were useful to her she kept on a leash—and that, by the way, is the answer to your question: how did Miss Ambros happen et cetera? And when Ann needed money, something always occurred that would drop it in her lap. Maybe she needs money now. Maybe she's trying to fake

a fatal accident and subsequently draw her own life insurance money—I am just juggling possibilities.”

“You have a rather necrophilic imagination, you old curmudgeon. When I think of poor Mrs. Ambros——”

“Poor Mrs. Ambros! That’s what people said of her all along. It was poor Mrs. Hopper when her first husband died, and she was left, a delectable and exceedingly touching young widow. Well, I say poor Mr. Hopper any time. In our files I happened to come across a fairly nasty correspondence relating to the expenses for Clyde Hopper’s funeral. She had taken out life insurance on him before he left for the Amazon and he succumbed as promptly to yellow fever as if she had ordered it for him, special delivery.”

“I’d really like to know what makes you so vindictive against a poor old woman whose remains we are about to locate. You can’t seriously blame her for her first husband’s catching a tropical fever and——”

“Not seriously and not directly. Indirectly—yes. I think she was to blame for it. You see, she had a lover, and poor Hopper knew about it, and her lover was her sister’s husband, and you’ll admit that’s enough of a muddle to drive a man into the jungles.”

Ryerson waited and Watts smoked silently, puff, puff, spark and darkness, spark and darkness. “I was deeply devoted to Ann’s sister Maud when I was a boy,” he said a little later. “There was something about her, a steadiness, a tranquillity—well, sheer goodness is hard to describe. The way Maud smiled: warm, friendly, from within—not that tooth-baring beauty-queen grin that nowadays goes for a smile——”

“Thanks, I don’t need a detailed description, I’m acquainted with that sort of a smile. Intimately acquainted.”

“Oh, quit harping on Corinne and make space for new impressions. We were talking about Ann and Maud and Maud’s husband. It was unfortunate that I ran into Ambros and Ann at the old Trocadero. That was a place where men about town would take some ladies of easy virtue to wine and dine and do something else. There were so-called suites upstairs, *chambres particulières* or what have you, definitely not a place where you would take your sister-in-law for a harmless dinner. The Trocadero was fairly far out of town, where now they have Stern’s Cove and concerts and culture, but it was a different story in those days. There were a few

such places of gay repute, the Cliff House, the Poodle Dog, but none of them as conveniently hidden away as the Trocadero. I was only a youngster and a rather innocent one and I can tell you, it gave me quite a jolt to meet Mr. Ambros there with Ann; I had only known him as an adoring husband and father up to then. It intrigued me and worried me and upset me. I didn't quite know how to act, and ever after that encounter I felt as if I were mixed up in a shady conspiracy and I couldn't face Maud and that was a great loss to my sixteen years, Tommy boy, believe it or not."

Ryerson chuckled in the dark. "You mean they had caught you stepping out just as much as you had caught them? Let me try and picture you as a sixteen-year-old in the abode of sin——"

"You have the smutty imagination of a Boston book censor, Tom. Nothing of the sort. I had gone out there to visit with a former cook of ours, a pitch-black genius who made the best chocolate soufflés in all northern California. But Ann tried to bribe me or blackmail me, whatever you like to call it, and that did something to me."

"Indeed? She bribed you? Honest, George? How?"

"By falling around my neck and kissing me in a way that put hot lumps into my marrows, and then she stepped back and cried: 'Why, George, I almost forgot that you're not a little boy any longer and I'm not your neighbour's little girl either—and what are you doing at the Trocadero of all places, you young dandy? All right, all right, I'm not asking another word, and we won't tell anybody that we met here, it might only trouble your mother, eh?' It was a primitive method but a very effective one and she didn't change it in all her life. A kiss and a kid-gloved threat. Mr. Ambros tried to save the situation by muttering something about friends they were expecting for a birthday celebration. Anyway, all their efforts were completely unnecessary, because I'd rather have let myself be burned at the stake than tell Maud what I knew or suspected. What's the time, Tom? We must soon be there."

"We haven't gone over the Pass yet. And your case wouldn't hold water in court. Hearsay and conjecture, George, and, in any case, what business of yours was it whether somebody's husband was running around with somebody's sister?"

"None—except that I was very fond of somebody called

Maud and that this encounter spoiled something for me. I didn't see Maud any more, and not much later she died, and after a respectable waiting period Ann and Mr. Ambros married. What with the war and one thing and another, the family fell on hard times, and the next time I saw Ann, I was a full-fledged lawyer and she came to my office to get my legal advice about how to get her hands on a substantial trust fund old man Ballard had left for Joy with Wells, Fargo. Ann still forgot at appropriate moments that she wasn't a little girl and that I wasn't a little boy, and she still had the habit of falling around one's neck and kissing any male she wished to bend to her aims. That time she worked quite hard on me, but old man Ballard's provisions were airtight, and that trust fund couldn't be touched. Do you have a match, Tom?"

Ryerson struck a match and relit Watts's cigar. In the brief flare he saw for a moment the old lawyer's bulldog face, intense and thoughtful; the stretcher, the blankets to be spread over a dead or dying old woman, and then it was dark again, the night outside as opaque as the darkness in the ambulance. It had begun to rain.

"If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you something, George," Ryerson said. "Why did you never get married?"

Watts did not answer instantly; he was sucking his cigar, there was the tiny spark of it, a little silence, at last a gruff chuckle. "I hand it to you, Tommy, you are a shrewd operator. If you mean, did Ann have anything to do with my becoming a gritty old bachelor, your guess is remotely correct. Very remotely, though. But if you have got the idea that I had been infatuated with the lady in question—well, it might make a saleable short story, but it was precisely the other way around. She was not the only woman I watched doing mischief, but she had been the first one, and that, somehow, sticks. Great Lord, the things lawyers and doctors get to see and hear could make a blue-ribbon bull impotent. Ann, sweet Angeline, made me suspicious of them all—in other words, she made me afraid of women in general. I might have overcome that fear, but every time I was just beginning to get out of it something else happened to her to keep all my worst suspicions on the alert. I learned on her, the way young medical students learn on the anatomy class skeleton. It may sound a bit fanciful to you, son, but that woman, as I watched her through the years, sort of poisoned something

in me. Now make something of it, if you can, my young friend."

"Just by giving you a kiss, and asking your advice in a legal matter? Isn't that going a bit too far, George?" Ryerson said. Fancy that, he thought, the loops and somersaults a gruff, lonesome old man's sentiments may execute. You really never know anything about the other fellow—

"Okay. So there was Joy's trust fund, and how much of the interest was actually used for Joy was none of my business, and I didn't wish to know. What I knew was that Ambros paid a high premium on an insurance for his precious fiddle—it was, in fact, over-insured. I must say in all honesty that Ann was justified in objecting to it. Keeping that fiddle was an outrageous piece of luxury, considering the financial strain under which the family was living. Probably you have to be a fiddler to understand such things, and, as you know, I don't know anything about music.

"And so their house on Vallejo Street burned down. Not quite, though; but that fiddle did. Fifty thousand dollars' worth of fiddle—and I represented the company who had to shell out the money. It was just a bit too pat, if you see what I mean. Nobody was at home when the house burned and there were suspicious details—a scrap of the velvet lining of the violin case, for instance, that most definitely smelled of gasoline and arson. This and that and another thing, plenty of dubious points to build a case on. I think if we had gone to court we could have proved that the fire hadn't been an accident. Well—but we didn't go to court. Ask me why not. Ann came to my office, crying and appealing to our old friendship and conjuring up Maud's memory, and there was a very ill, almost dying husband, and soapy-voiced O'Shaughnessy was using his influence with our board and——"

"And? Yes—and . . .?" said Ryerson and then he struck a match and carefully lit his pipe while stealing a glance at the lawyer's face.

"All right, master mind, your guess is correct. I gave in. I caved in somehow, let's say she corrupted me. No, not at all what you think, son. I did not sleep with Ann. I didn't remotely dream of such a thing. She was in her forties then, a very handsome forty, I admit, but no tempting Messalina or Cleopatra. It was a matter of pity, I suppose. Believe me, there is no more corrupting thing than pity at the wrong spot. Weakness that breeds weakness. Ann was just sweet and defenceless and pathetic: Danger from Deer.

"Listen, Tommy, that's a confession, keep it to yourself. I barely saved my self-respect by bargaining her down into an agreement. Wait a moment, don't say anything yet: five months later Florian Ambros died. Suicide.

"I knew it. Joy knew it. The doctor knew it. Ann knew it. She even admitted in a heart-rending little scene, alone with me in my office—no witnesses, you understand. There was a life insurance with no indemnity in case of suicide. I don't have to tell you the end. Yes, we paid it. I never said a word and let Ambros have an honest death and my company paid for it. Let's suppose I closed my eyes on account of Joy. I couldn't bring myself to make her burden still heavier than it was. Look here, Tom, I'm an old-fashioned fellow and my story has an old-fashioned moral. It wouldn't be worth discussing Ann if she were something extraordinary. But she is as commonplace as parsley; there are millions of her, there's hardly anyone whose path hasn't been crossed by her kind. A psychopathic liar—but that means a scientific simplification. Ann is the queen who can never do wrong, because she just knows that she is right. Millions of Anns who live in complete harmony with themselves, beating angelic wings while they strangle their children, poison the wells, sow deadly nightshade in the fields, plant malignant growths in the brains of their nearest and dearest, and turn the average home into one of the nether regions of hell, Amen. So help me God, I do hope Ann broke her neck while it's still time for Maud's child to pick up a life of her own."

He pulled back the curtain, rolled down a window, and flung out the end of his cigar. The night pressed into the ambulance with the black, loud, steady rustle of rain. "There——" Watts said. "Would you say we're over the Pass, my boy?"

Angelina was sloshing through the rain, her torn stockings were hanging down so that she was treading upon them with every step, but when she tried to bend over and pull them off, there was such a stiffness and pain all through her that she gave up. She was leaning against the rain, a cold wind drove it at her with hard, spanking streaks of water. Her mink coat was soaked through, it would probably cost a fortune to have it restored after this adventure. She had sold the Generalin's

baroque commode to the museum for twenty-four hundred dollars and bought the coat with the money. Who would have thought that old piece of furniture would bring so much? It had only been in the way in the confined Greenwich Street apartment, whereas a mink coat gave you caste; it was like a badge, a membership card announcing that you belonged—in spite of all reverses suffered—to the higher strata of society. But out in the open spaces of the West, on a rainy, windy night, a mink coat wasn't much of an asset.

Angelina's thoughts had become a queer tangle; there were remembrances and words and images and here and there a flashing clear scrap of reality, all intermingled as they sometimes are just before one falls asleep. But fall asleep she would not. If she knew one thing, it was that she had to keep going. But once more she had lost track of the why and whither and wherefore. It was only the purposeful tenacity inhabiting the frail shell that kept her in motion.

The embankment had flattened out more and more and at last she found herself almost on the same level with the road-bed and the rails. A little later she even perceived that on the other side, beyond the right of way, beyond a narrow strip of ground veiled by the slashing rain, a highway seemed to stretch comfortably ahead. She blinked and peered and reconnoitred, but her eyelashes were dripping and an immeasurable amount of rain hung curtains of black glass beads between her and that road. She took out her drenched handkerchief and went through the motion of drying her face, while she calculated the risks of crossing those tracks. Once or twice she could see beyond the hazy dark stretch of ground the headlights of some passing truck, their rays resting like solid beams on the rain. How silly of me, Angelina thought, here I've been struggling along on the wrong side of the tracks, while there's a smooth highway over there, full of cars who'd gladly give me a lift. She laughed softly to herself. Wrong side of the tracks. It had taken on a new meaning. Wait till I tell The Girls about it, she thought; it was a comforting thought.

The Girls, her own generation; Caroline Brooks, née Bensinger; Margreth Granger, née Frankel; Irma Frankel, née Granger; flower shows, bridge, lectures, committees, club luncheons. Among The Girls she was respected and considered an authority on various subjects. "Angelina is so continental," they said. "Imagine all the celebrities you've

met through your husband," they said with that pinch of envy that gave spice to their friendship. "Remember when we were in Vienna together?" Margreth would tease her. "That archduke who absolutely wanted to marry you? Handsomest devil you've ever seen, *Girls*. And perfectly crazy about Ann. He was so handsome he made me swoon, honest to God; we did a lot of swooning in those days, didn't we?"

Angelina had learned to be broad-minded about people like the Frankel-Granger tribe, but really, Margreth had a nerve pretending that she too had known the Archduke.

"I'd rather see young women swoon than do some of the things they're doing nowadays," Caroline Brooks would remark, hinting, of course, at the goings on between Susan and that Larry Grant, while Charles was fighting for his country——

Angelina shook her head; it made a tepid runnel of water trickle down her neck and creep like a wet worm inside her blouse and along her spine; she shuddered. I'm going in a circle, she thought desolately; Susan and Charles and that man Grant; and Joy. And Florian. I mustn't get chills. I mustn't get chills and die of pneumonia like Maud; I must get across the rails and to the highway.

It seemed simple enough. However, she had taken only a few steps, searching for a foothold between the ties, when the ground began to shake and a panting monster rushed roaring out of nowhere and grew enormous at an unbelievable speed. For a second everything was turmoil, confusion, and almost-death; but she kept blindly stumbling ahead and across and slumped down in a heap on the other side. Drowned in dripping slushy grass, she was trying to breathe after the shock, trying not to die then and there. But there was the voice calling faintly through the shattering, thundering, drumming rush of train and rain and night: "Don't fall asleep, Angelina, get up, don't give in, you must go on——"

"I can't, don't you see I'm tired?" she cried miserably, "I want to sleep, that's all I want to do—stay where I am, and rest, and sleep——"

"Rest and sleep and die," said the voice.

"All right. And die. I don't care," muttered Angelina, but at the same time she was sitting up and opening her eyes and, softly moaning, she was struggling to get up on her feet once more.

She would beg a ride on the next passing vehicle, she would sit next to the driver and lean her head back and let herself fall asleep. She had quite a definite picture of that driver, too. A big, tough man, a red-haired giant, coarse but good-natured, wearing a shirt and riding breeches and a large straw hat with a band of pheasant feathers. She could almost smell his steaming large body; beer, tobacco, sweat, molasses, and the dust of Leihana. "Go! Off with you! Go away!" she said loudly to Hopper, and he slunk off to make place for a truck driver in a clumsy, wool-lined leather jacket from the Army and Navy Store. For a few seconds she basked in the warm sensation of being saved, lifted into the truck, covered with a blanket, consoled and protected by that unknown truck driver. If he were to take her back to San Francisco, so much the better. My own apartment, she told herself, my own bed. Joy will have a fire in my bedroom and brew me some tea—but first I'll ask her to fix me a hot bath, with Epsom salts and a dash of lavender; and give me a rub afterwards—thanks, Daughter Dear—and, please, don't forget to turn off the radio as soon as I'm asleep—

"You mustn't fall asleep, don't give in, old girl, keep going," Hopper said, or it might have been Johnny O'Shaughnessy, or the truck driver she had conjured out of the night; or possibly even old Mr. Ballard. A big man, in any case, to whom one might turn as a last resort. Obediently Angelina collected her stiff smarting limbs as though they had been scattered far and wide, and attempted to cross the narrow no man's land between the tracks and the highway.

But what had seemed a fairly simple one-minute trip turned out to be a vicious sort of obstacle course, a testing ground for her last reserves of strength. There was first a ditch filled with gurgling water into which she stepped up to her calves. A hedge of reed and bullrush, sharp, prickling, bladelike; and next a barbed-wire fence that blocked her from going forward; yet turning back seemed by now just as impossible. For a few panicky seconds she was senselessly thrashing around and then she began to cry. Crying bitterly, she groped herself along that barbed wire in search for some opening. Another car came down the highway, a nice sedan going east, much nearer now and yet just as inaccessible, and a truck whizzled by while she was calling and waving. She did not care any longer about skinning, scratching, and bruising herself; by now she had stopped feeling anything but the

stiffness in her body and the weight of her water-logged coat and garments. "Let's see," she said aloud, "I'm small, I'll get through somehow, I'm glad I always watched my figure, such a slip of a girl, men always said, 'a twenty-six-inch waist-line like a sixteen-year-old, you're really amazing, Ann!'" Indeed, it still happened that some soldier or sailor boy would follow her on the street and whistle at her; and only when she turned around and showed him her darling old lady's face would those fresh kids grin and slink away in shame. "All right; let's try it," she said, whipping herself into action. She pulled off her mink coat and hung it over the fence; in spite of the rain it felt almost good to be rid of its bulk and weight. She lowered herself down to the ground, pressed her body flat into the wet, cropped grass, and lifting the lowest strand of the wire as much as it would give, she wriggled forward under it. "There, I made it," she said proudly as she was catching her breath, and never mind that some of the barbs had torn into the back of her jacket. Maud would never have got through here; neither would Joy. She had to wait a short while until she felt strong enough to get up and put on her heavy coat again. The shallow ditch she had yet to cross was not worth mentioning, and the smell of tarred wood led her to a stack of fence posts at the side of the highway on which she sat down to wait for the next vehicle, regardless of where it would take her. The rain had thinned down to a steady rustle.

After a considerable interval a truck appeared, going west. Angelina waved her wet handkerchief as a shipwrecked man might tie his shirt to the makeshift mast of his life raft. But her tiny flag of distress was not white any longer: streaked with mud and dirt and blood, it had become all but invisible, and the truck came on with long wavy reflections on the shiny pavement, and passed, and went, the wicked little eye of the tail-light rushing away, together with the noise and clank and hot oil smell of the diesel engine. The driver had not seen Angelina, probably he was asleep at the wheel, or drunk, or he just didn't feel like stopping, the stinking brute. She shook her fist and called him every filthy name that leaped to her tongue. She was unspeakably, unbearably tired as she let herself fall on to that hard seat of tarred posts again. The truck was gone but its noise still remained; or perhaps it was her immeasurable tiredness that roared and clanked and drummed and thundered in her ears. Head noises, she

thought. Sometimes a strident phone was shrilling in her head by the hour, sometimes a ferocious crackling as of fire; roaring waterfalls, hissing steam, pounding waves, and most of the time her heartbeat echoed in there as loud as a battle drum; in particular when she was alone and a bit tired. She was very tired now, she hadn't been so tired since the Fire, and the calling voice was resounding and echoing inside her skull till the minute structure of her middle ear seemed to assume the shape and proportion of the Carlsbad Cavern. Then, as if cut off by an invisible switch, all noises ceased and it was suddenly quiet; completely and absolutely and frighteningly quiet.

Only a very high, thin, unearthly tone spanning that abyss of soundlessness: A cricket? The ghost of a murdered fiddle . . . ?

"No, no, no," Angelina wailed and pressed her hands to her ears and stuffed her fingers into them to lock out that tone which would not be silenced. "Don't, Flori, please, stop it, don't, it's mean of you to torment me so, it's the meanest thing you ever did to me, don't remind me of it, I can't stand it, not now when I'm so dead tired and down and all in!" But the memories of the night when their house on Vallejo Street had burned down, with the Empress in it, these memories were ruthless and they snapped at you like a pack of wild dogs and they were everywhere, and you were too weak to fight them off tonight and the dead fiddle kept playing the high, eerie note across that frightening, mute, bottomless silence, a silence which might mean that she was getting deaf, or else it might mean the end for her. Death?

"God," Angelina whispered, "you know how it happened. Don't let me down now, God——"

Because the burning of the Empress had been one of the rare occasions when Angelina had trusted her fate to God; more or less, that is. Since the evening in Vienna when she had discovered that you couldn't even trust your own father, she had never been able to trust anyone—not even God. Not absolutely and completely. But there had been a time when her own small helpless self had come to the end of the rope and in her desperation and despondency she had turned to Him, and He was still made in the image of a kind, middle-aged, bearded gentleman who loved you fondly and forgave you everything, but who, on the other hand, often seemed preoccupied with other things and sometimes not

quite, not completely reliable, although—it was to be hoped—He would do His best; and so, in her great need, Angelina had begged Him for help.

Since Florian's health was failing his earnings had shrunk to almost nothing; it was heart-rending to see the man you loved waste away without being able to afford him the best care, the greatest specialists, the miracle cure, the one and only treatment or operation that would make him well again. Angelina refused to believe that anything but lack of money prevented her from buying back Florian's health. But there was no money, only Joy's puny four thousand, a painful, decorous, class-conscious penury. They were living in a jungle of debts, a wilderness of unfulfilled obligations. The house was mortgaged, her jewels pawned, and they had almost fallen behind on the premiums of the insurance, that insanely high insurance, for Flori's useless fiddle. Large, heavy, bulky debts on one hand and mean little bloodsucking fleas of debts on the other. A deluge of unpaid bills, the grocer's, the butcher's, God Almighty, we've got to eat, you need the doctor, if we don't pay soon they'll disconnect the telephone and shut off the gas, coal has to be stored for the winter, the roof is leaking, the plumber didn't come when I called for him, what are we to do with that plugged-up toilet, and I tell you one thing, if I don't get a new winter coat I simply can't let myself be seen on the street.

This was 1927 and all around them people were living high, wide, and handsome, wallowing in money, bursting at the seams with stock market gains and prosperity, and the contrast between so much lush abundance and their own scrimping made it still shabbier and harder to bear.

Accidentally, the new Episcopal cathedral on Nob Hill had become quite fashionable just then and the plan for solving their financial problems came to her in all its magnificent simplicity during Sunday service; it was floating down to her on organ chords and a slanting sunbeam, and enveloped her instantly in such a wonderful feeling of relief and well-being that she could only assume God-father Himself meant to show her the way. It was a revelation the Lord had sent her in answer to her half-hearted prayer and she accepted it with humble gratefulness and went to work on it. God, on His part, after putting that plan into her mind, in His great power and kindness took care of the rest. Certainly it was more than just a fortunate coincidence that

Joy gave a lecture in San Jose on the very same evening when Florian insisted on attending young Paul Horner's concert, and the house thus remained empty for once. "Are you quite sure you're well enough to go, dear? Are you certain it won't tax your strength too much? Is it really so important for you to hear that boy tonight?" Angelina was fussing over Florian, but secretly she hoped he would insist.

"Stop yammering about me, darling, I'm quite well. It might not be so very important for me but it definitely is highly important for the boy that I be at the concert. Besides, I'm quite curious to see how Paul will stand up before an audience. He is my heir presumptive, there's great promise in that boy, and I hope he'll carry on where I had to leave off. I often think that poor tired old Europe is bowing out and the time has come for America and Americans to take over culture, music, the arts—if I can hand on to my pupils some of the things I know about musical tradition, I'll feel that I've done my little bit as an American citizen—better than I did by driving an ambulance through the mud of France."

The rhetoric went past Angelina's ear but she gave Florian a wife's absently encouraging smile. "Well, that's fine, dear. But do me the favour and go upstairs now and take a good rest; just stay in your room and don't budge until I have a taxi at the door. I'll take care of everything——"

Honestly, it wasn't as if she had set the house on fire; she had left it in the hands of God to do that. She even said a brief silent prayer of a sort after she had accidentally dropped the bottle with the lighter fluid on to the soft silk wrappings of her pampered rival, the Empress. There was enough inflammable stuff on top of the piano to burn down all of Vallejo Street if God in His great kindness willed it thus. If, on the other hand, God did not wish that fiddle to be burned, well, then nothing would happen, and it had been just a little misunderstanding between her and Him. Loose sheets of music were piled up on the piano, more of them on the music stand, and next to the open violin-case stood the lamp with the chafed-through, badly insulated cord. As a precaution Angelina had even phoned the electrician to come and repair it, but on account of one of those unpaid little items the man had rudely mumbled that he'd send a boy around sometime next week—maybe. In the grate a coal fire was glowing, and as Angelina put more coal on it, she

happened to tip over the little kerosene can which always stood next to the coal scuttle; some of the kerosene spilled on to the rug; not much of it, though. If, by sheer accident, some glowing embers were to drop on that rug, catch the sheets of music that had fallen from the stand, creep up the curtains, meet with the improvised danger zone on the piano——

There was the taxi chauffeur ringing the doorbell and Angelina flung the chinchilla wrap over her old evening dress. The hall mirror paid her a compliment; there's nothing like chinchilla to give class to a lady, and permit me to say that you look much younger than you are. "It's time to go, Flori!" she sang up the hall. "Taxi's waiting."

Florian emerged from the bedroom and came downstairs with a pathetic and pitiful attempt at putting the old dash into his appearance: tuxedo, homburg, the elegant slim overcoat jauntily thrown over his shoulders, with the automatic nonchalance of a great virtuoso leaving the greenroom and smiling at his expectant admirers. Angelina's heart tightened as she looked at him, because the collar of his dress shirt had grown too wide in a way that boded ill and the tuxedo hung about his emaciated frame, much too large and loose. He took off his hat and put his cigarette away as he stood before her; this, too, was done with the old sweeping gesture of gallantry, and overwrought as Angelina was at that moment, she suddenly felt as though she had fallen in love with him all over again. "How tall you are," she said, "and so handsome. Come, bend down or I can't reach you." He bent down to her and she tucked his black tie in place, turned up the collar of his overcoat, and rested her fingertips for a second on the sharpened, still beautiful lines of his cheekbones. "You—old gypsy——" she said with a strained smile. The taxi chauffeur rang impatiently a second time. She clung for a moment to Florian, almost crying, her arms around his poor, thin neck. You'll never know what I'm doing for you, she thought. It's a secret between God and me only. Florian opened the front door for her and let her pass. "Dear me, now I forgot my gloves! Go ahead, you mustn't catch cold, wait in the taxi," she said, almost pushing him into the cab.

"I suppose I should be grateful that you aren't carting me to the concert in a baby buggy, you little fool," he said, tolerantly amused. Angelina went back to the study.

She hardly ever smoked, but now she quickly lit a cigarette, took a few deep drags, saw the tip come alive, and without looking where it fell she dropped it carelessly on top of the piano. She took the fire tongs, lifted two or three bits of glowing coal from the grate, and these, too, she let fall where they might. It was then that she said what amounted to a second prayer. I did all I could, from here on it's up to You, Lord. Do as You please—but if You are omniscient, You will know that we need the money more than that fiddle. I've done my part, Lord, now You do Yours. Amen.

Vindictive? Yes, perhaps, and for good reasons; she had never liked the Empress and never been able to understand Florian's morbid infatuation with his instrument. It would be a relief to be rid of her; she only cluttered up his life and ate up a fortune in premiums. Angelina picked up her gloves which she had purposely forgotten on a chair; at the door she threw another glance back at the room; some of the scattered music sheets on the floor were beginning to turn brown and curl up at the edges. As Angelina was closing the door and leaving the house she felt that she had once more done her duty. She was buttoning her long gloves as she sat down in the taxi and searched for Florian's hand. "Didn't you forget to turn off the lamp in the study?" he asked.

"I left the light burning on purpose. It's safer since there were those burglaries in the neighbourhood. And I hate to come home to a dark house; or have you forgotten what a silly little coward I am?"

The house was bright enough by the time they returned, four blocks of Vallejo Street were closed off, firemen and hose tumbling all over the place, and another one of San Francisco's old matchbox homes was going up in flames. Angelina felt grateful, deeply and devoutly grateful, to the Power Above who, it was rightly claimed, let no sparrow fall from his nest, and she contemplated making a donation to the church where she had been blessed with her revelation. As soon as I get my fifty thousand from the insurance company I'll donate a hundred dollars in cash; or even two hundred if I can afford it, she pledged to herself and the Lord.

But later, when all the trouble about the recovering of the insurance money started and it went downhill with Florian and he deserted her in such a final and irrevocable way without any explanation or farewell, Angelina was left wondering

if possibly she had misunderstood God after all. She put all thoughts of devout generosity out of her mind and began to feel uncomfortable in church and went there less and less often, until she stopped going to the swank Sunday service of Grace Cathedral altogether. One might have said that she tried to evade meeting Him the way you try to evade someone before whom you have committed some embarrassing social slip.

But tonight was not the time for such lighthearted and cavalier evasion. Tonight she had to face herself, and not in one of the flattering mirrors which told her that she was the Fairest of Them All. She was sitting on the stacked-up posts at the wayside, hunched over as if a heavy hand were pressing down on her. "Lord, I'm so sorry, Lord," she whispered. "I'm terribly sorry if I did the wrong thing and I'll go to church regularly from now on, I promise. But, God Almighty, you know that I meant well——"

Two more cars passed by without taking notice of her and then the highway seemed to have gone out of business altogether. A cold, raw wind rose out of the night, and beyond that black, bleak, empty, cold wind Florian was urging her on once more: Get up, Angelina, you can't remain here, move on, for a brief span only, it shall not be long now——

"But I can't any more, Flori, I simply can't. I'm tired, don't you see, I'm cold and weak and tired to death," she pleaded. Yet after a while she discovered that she was walking all the same, as though without her doing she found one foot after the other stepping on the white line in the centre of the road and each step made a sucking noise in her drenched shoes and the wind was now behind her, nudging her onwards with chilly, wet hands. The rain played a furious crescendo and became a cloudburst once more. The wind grew into a gale, pushing her rudely, forcing her old legs into a run, bending her like a whipped little tree, hitting her on the back, pressing her soaking garments against her shuddering spine, obscenely lifting her skirt, slashing into the bruised skin of her legs. She felt outraged and assaulted, and with the outrage a bit of force returned to her. "All right, then, all right," she gasped grimly, "if this be one of God's little jokes, let me have it. If this storm be a little demonstration, a lesson to teach me what my sister Maud went through the day she caught pneumonia, I'm sorry, that's all I can say. Honestly and truly, I'm awfully sorry, do You hear me? Maybe I was

a bit thoughtless; not much imagination, that's what Joy always tells me, but that's not a crime, is it? Too wrapped up in myself, that's what Susan says and what Charles thinks of me; but what am I to do about it? Change myself, become a different person? But how? You can't teach an old dog new tricks, can you, and I'm a very old dog, very old and beaten, but yes, I shall try. Help me, Florian, help me to get home, Joy, Charles, help me, help me and I shall try to change, I'll try hard." Again she thought miserably, but it's no use, I'll never get home, never. I can't go on, she thought in deepest despair, I'm done for and this is the end of me. I'd like to make up for a few things I did wrong, But it's too late now. Forgive me, Flori, maybe I didn't love you the right way, but it was the only way I knew and maybe it is not good to love anyone as much as I loved you. Forgive me, Lord, and you, Joy, Charles, forgive me, my children, I am sorry, do you hear me, I am sorry, sorry—

Spent, beaten, lost. Nothing left in the end but a wounded animal's instincts. Shelter from the cruel rainstorm. Rest for the broken body. A respite for the weakening heart and lungs. Nothing else counted by the time Angelina reached the last station of the castigating night.

A road came out of the darkness, hunching its back like a giant cat where it met at a right angle with the main highway, and creeping away into darkness on the other side. The encounter of road and highway formed an underpass that opened its black mouth and swallowed Angelina down into its gullet. She was too exhausted to comprehend the miracle: in there it was dry, no rain, even the wind remained somewhere locked out and the air became the familiar stuff intended for breathing in place of the suffocating streams of water that had been choking her; in there it was warm and grew ever warmer the deeper you went into that merciful shelter, that dark kind cradle and womb and safety: it was Beatrice's black shawl all over again.

Angelina leaned her back against the wall, receiving its support with limitless gratitude. She let herself glide down, and in the total darkness her body discovered another bit of overwhelming luxury. There was, it appeared, a sort of sidewalk or ramp on which to sit and rest your feet on the ground. Angelina was reduced to the essential well-being of hobos and tramps, she was testing the fundamental contentment of those poorest, lowest creatures who made their living

rooms in the shelter of bridges and their beds in deserted barns. Except that hobos and tramps were better equipped for it than Angelina. Oh, for a cigarette now to steady her nerves, a box of matches or a flashlight to inspect her dwelling, a batch of old papers to stuff between herself and her wet clothes. What more could you ask for comfort? Perhaps a few twigs, or the debris of an old crate, to make a little fire, dry herself, create a private paradise. Suddenly her lazy imagination began to work overtime, conjuring up more and more delights: a hot cup of tea; or soup, thick, steaming Salvation Army soup. Or better yet, a strong, fiery drink to chase away the chills. A bed to lie down in, great mercy, was there anything in the world as wonderful and desirable and heavenlike as a bed in which to stretch out, a blanket to pull up to your nose, just a bed and rest—

She peeled off the drenched, cold, horrible weight of her mink coat that had been clinging to her like a drowning person and had almost pulled her down too. Mink coat be hanged! Take the mink coat and give me a dry towel, just any sort of a dry rag, to rub myself with. Her skirt was soaking wet and she slipped out of it. Her jacket was damp on the outside but the lining was fair and her blouse underneath almost dry. She peeled off her garments piece by piece, the loathsome shoes, the torn nylon stockings at four dollars a pair which only made her yearn for thick woollen socks and a gardener's rubber boots. Her girdle was the only garment that had held the flood off her body, and there you can see how right I was, preaching to Joy that a lady, however slender, must never fail to wear a girdle. Supposing Joy had got into this sort of a predicament—and without a girdle; what would she have used to keep herself from catching pneumonia and dying like her mother?

Groping, touching, testing in the dark, Angelina arranged herself until she was dressed again in a haphazard and highly fragmentary way, keeping the halfway dry pieces close to her body and discarding the wet ones. She was rallying with the astounding tenacity inherent in small beings. But she was still as tired as she had never believed a human creature could be. She leaned her head against the wall, closed her eyes, and did some summing up.

She felt quite good now, very light, all the lasting weight and worry taken from her. "The pattern was all wrong,"

she said, smiling to herself. Like the time when she had tried to earn money with petit point embroidery. You counted and counted, you made a little mistake here and another little mistake there, and from then on you could never get the pattern right. You had to throw it away or rip out the whole thing. So many mistakes in life's pattern—but would there still be time to rip it out? I was selfish, I did not know it, but I know it now. Selfishness is the loneliest thing on earth, someone told me once—that man Larry Grant; it sounded as if he knew about loneliness, but I was deaf then. Now I begin to hear, now—give me time, please, only time enough to undo what I have done, too thers and to myself. I've always asked for more than I had and never been satisfied; how come I feel contented and at peace now, when I have nothing but a dry place to sit and rest in the dark? "*Viel vergebliche Unruhe*," Florian had called it: much futile unrest. All proportions had changed, the weight had been shifted, and everything that had seemed important had been blown away by the dark wind of this night.

Let them live their lives and I'll live mine—whatever may be left of it, she thought; can you tell me why I got all worked up about Charles and Susan and Larry Grant? It's none of my business and I'm too old anyway to understand those young people. As for Joy—she tried to kill me, and I still don't know what I've done that she hates me so bitterly while I'm so fond of her. I loved you so when you were a baby, Joy, and I did carry you in my arms out of the burning house, that's not a lie, I really did. It is true, Beatrice walked ahead of us, but if she had not been there, believe me, I would have saved you all the same, my little Joy——

She was almost falling asleep, with little Joy fat and heavy in her arms. You're cute, you are my pretty mama, Charley said, patting her cheeks with his sticky little boy's fingers. My little Annie has a good head for figures, said Father; I bet you'll be the belle of the ball, he said. Have mercy on me and promise me one more waltz before I burn to a crisp before your very eyes, said the Archduke. I know I'm not good enough for you but I do love you so, Chappie, said a contrite, big, redheaded man whose name she couldn't remember. I'd chuck my wife any time if you'd say the word, Annie, said Johnny O'Shaughnessy. And then Charles had something else to say: We're only kidding you, Mother; if we didn't love you we wouldn't have our little fun with you,

and the children are crazy about you. Be quiet, Mother, lie down, I'll bring you your heating pad, said Joy. . . .

She was immersed in a great warmth, it was all around her, soothing, relieving, fragrant. So many people, so many voices, all holding something out to her, all offering her a gift, fondness, affection, care. She was drifting away in the eternal rhythm and exchange of give and take, but the voices did not leave her alone. She pulled herself together.

Look here, Joy, you wouldn't have been happy with your Fred Hollenbeck, he wasn't the right man for you, terribly ambitious, and ambition is a bitter brew, ask me, I know something about it. Nonsense, you're not too old to marry, Joy—and we'll do something to your hair, they tell me there's a marvellous new girl at Lampert's. Of course, you shouldn't have tried to kill me, but there are two sides to everything—if I had only known it sooner——

Listen to me, Florian, whatever I might have done wrong, I love you. I've not always told the truth, but that's the one thing I never lied about. I loved you from the moment I saw you, I never stopped loving you and I shall love you to my last hour and beyond——

Angelina was asleep, almost. The mink coat was still soaking wet, but her hair had begun to dry, it always dried fast, that fine, silky baby hair of hers. She was just letting herself sink deeply into the soft cushion of sleep when Florian called her: "Angelina! Angelina! Angelina! Come here! Wake up and come to me!"

"Not just now. Please let me rest a little. I'm tired."

"Angelina! Angelina!"

She opened her eyes and shook her head. A dream, or head noises again. Confound Dr. Bryant's symptoms of old age. She was staring into the black tunnel that had given her shelter and that now, before her eyes, began to take shape. Like the dim first contours on a negative in the developing fluid a large square of grey slowly appeared on the blackness where the underpass opened out into the cruel night. There was a faint motion of a distant light in that opening, it grew diffuse, translucent, and then a yellow gleam painted the strings of rain out there, it entered her shelter, and brushed along the wall and suddenly came into view with its precise pattern of brick and cement. The gleam and its shining reflection grew sharper and stronger and the voice was calling with mounting urgency and yet from an ever more remote,

an inconceivable distance. Then she could see nothing but a great, blinding light.

"Yes, I am coming," Angelina answered obediently, as she walked on her bare feet out into the rain, towards that light. The mink coat, a wet bundle of filth, was left behind.

"I just can't make head or tail of it," Sheriff Lambson had muttered a few minutes earlier, wiping the rain from his face. "We've been over every darn inch of ground between the Pass and the river and there's not a trace of anybody having had an accident. Now, to my experience, dead bodies don't walk away by themselves, and injured people leave tracks." Scratching his corrugated forehead, he was training his flashlight on the report the train crew had left in Tokema and scanned it once more. "Makes no sense any way you look at it. Miss Ambros came into the lounge-car and asked for a drink after they had passed the Third Loop, and before they got to the Pass the old lady had disappeared. That leaves us about twelve miles at the utmost where to search for her. Okay, we turned up every goddamned stone and if one of you can make sense of it——"

"All I know is that I've got to take an intra-uterine tumour out at 7 a.m. and it's past three now," Dr. Gerrick grumbled. "I'd say we've done all we could and I'd say it's high time we got home."

McFarland, a person who by profession knew how to handle bodies, was still poking among the dripping scrub with his flashlight. Major Ryerson had gone forward to the sheriff's car where Miss Ambros was sitting, very stiff, very erect, terribly white-lipped, but clad in a countenance of stainless steel. Ryerson felt an impulse to do something, anything, to melt her, thaw her out, make her cry or something. "Cigarette, Miss Ambros?"

"Oh yes. Thanks. Thank you so much."

"This is a grim business. We men should have had more sense than to let you come along."

"No, that's all right. I should have gone out of my mind if I'd had to wait in that station for the outcome."

"George Watts told me how devoted you were—are—to your mother. It must all seem so very callous to you, Miss Ambros; but efficiency usually makes that impression."

"It's all my fault. I'd gladly be dead if that would help to bring Mother back to life—and I'm not given to melodramatics, Major Ryerson."

"I don't wish to sound like a brainless, Godforsaken optimist. But I've my own theory, Miss Ambros. I don't quite believe that your mother is dead. Perhaps she had strength enough to drag herself away. Or, what's more probable, someone found her in the meantime and transported her off in the other direction. There's Winnemucca down on Route 40."

A little flicker passed the stony face. "You have a lively imagination, Major Ryerson; that's not an easy thing to live with. Frisky—a runaway horse if you can't break it in early enough."

Is that so? Ryerson thought. And what do *you* know about it, Miss Ambros, and what sort of a runaway horse is it you're sitting on?

"Mine is broken in, almost too housebroken, I'd say. You see, I'm trying to write short stories—and have them published too," he said through a screen of embarrassment.

Her long grey eyes looked at him steadily. "Is that the reason you joined this picnic? Are you on the scent of a nice juicy plot?" she said and it was curious that it sounded sad rather than incisive.

"I'm afraid my reasons are not so clear-cut, but I assure you that there were enough thrilling plots in the Pacific to last me a lifetime. Let's suppose that I came along because I thought I could probably be of some use. Or does that seem too uncomplicated?"

"No. It seems very kind. Forgive my being rude. My nerves are on edge." Her hand came hesitantly out of the car window and waited for his. He quickly pulled off his glove and received this cold hand in his warm one and held it there for another second. "There comes the sheriff, let's see what he has decided. In any case—keep your chin up, Joy."

"It's a fairly tough chin and—thanks for the cigarette. Thanks for everything."

"We are going on to Winnemucca to see if she's been taken there by chance," the sheriff announced, getting back into the car. "Just try and relax, lady. We'll find your mother yet, dead or alive."

Dead or alive, thought Joy, whatever it is, it seems the end

of me. If she is dead, I'll have myself locked away in some institution. If she's alive, she'll have me in prison if it costs her last breath. Poor Charley! It's tough luck having a mother and a sister both of whom meant a bit too well by you. What a bitter joke, to come out of the war without a scratch and get this for a home-coming party. Poor little brother, poor Charley. Oh hell, don't get soft now, you fool, keep your chin up, Joy, relax, lady, relax——

The car screamed on the wet highway as Deputy McFarland jammed on the brakes, and the ambulance behind bumped into them with a sharp jolt. "What in hell——" the sheriff said, staring at the apparition that emerged from the underpass and stood, barefoot, and with raised arms, in the beam of their headlights. There were a few utterly confused moments which none of them could remember afterwards, but it seemed that they all were tumbling from the two cars and running towards Angelina; Joy, far in front, was tearing ahead of the field like a champion racehorse at the finish. "Mother," she cried as loudly as she could but not a sound came from her throat, "Mother, you're alive, Mother, you didn't die, thank you, oh, thank you——" She did not know what she wanted to do—take the small, white-haired figure in her arms, lift her, carry her, kiss her, thank her again and again for being alive. But she stopped short and blocked the soundless outburst, two steps from Angelina, and the next moment the men had caught up with them, talking, asking questions, one shouting louder than the other. Now, thought Joy. Now she will tell them. Now it's all over with me. Charley, poor, poor Charley.

Never had Angelina been smaller, frailer, more helpless, more compelling. Tiny, dirty bare feet, face streaked with mud and tears, thin, old, yet still graceful legs crusted with blood; her white hair curling up like a wispy halo and her body covered by a ragtag medley of underwear and blouse and girdle and her good Rodier scarf instead of a skirt. But in spite of all this, Angelina was smiling. It was a slow smile, an angelic smile that came up like a tiny sunrise, a new, very kind smile, which, however, had a little spice of a sly, feminine understanding in it. Joy did not grasp the meaning of that smile until Angelina spoke.

"I am sorry to cause all this trouble," she said sweetly. "You must forgive me, please—George—Major Ryerson—and you, gentlemen. I'm such a foolish old woman—and my

heart is not very strong—I must have had one of my dizzy spells, you know—and I fell off the train. Such a nuisance—and so silly of me——”

There was, Joy believed, an almost amused little wink of conspiracy in Mother’s right eye. A mountain began to move and to shift itself and to leave the place in Joy’s breast where it had been resting its weight as far back as she could remember. “Mother—dear—dear——” she sighed, and then she, too, began to smile. She did not know it, but she was smiling. Angelina had used the moment to give in at last and let herself faint in the sheriff’s arms. Major Ryerson caught Joy, who, completely unfamiliar with the odd relieving thing that happened to her, had also fainted. Unconscious for a few blissful seconds, she was still smiling. Ryerson looked wonderingly into her suddenly transformed, suddenly soft and relaxed and beautiful face.

Who knows? Perhaps . . . was what he thought.

“Two blackouts, that’s the limit. Let’s get out from under the rain,” George Watts said gruffly, “before I drop too.” Stomping ahead, he led them into the shelter of the underpass where Angelina was bedded on the blanket McFarland had adroitly brought from the ambulance. Dr. Gerrick was kneeling over her with his stethoscope, listening, probing, testing. Joy came to first.

“How is she, Doctor?”

Dr. Gerrick got up with a grin. “Seems to be perfectly okay. Pulse normal, no fracture as far as I can see, heart all right. Just pooped, that’s all. How many miles would you say she’s been tramping through the rain?” He let his flashlight flicker over the fragile, small, touchingly tender form of Angelina and shook his head.

“Toughest little old lady I’ve ever seen in my life,” he said.

